

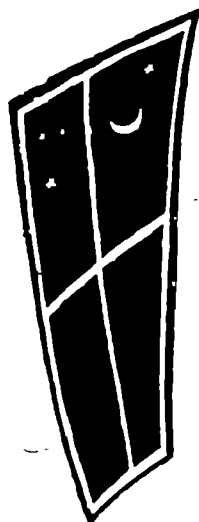
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30



This is 9 year old Julie.  
She's going to grow up to either be  
a social worker or a sex worker.  
And you're going to decide which.



KP-A 1009



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Yes, I, \_\_\_\_\_ would like to adopt a 'Nanhi Kali' like Julie. ☐ Enclosed is my cheque of Rs. 1200 (@ Rs. 100 p.m.) in favour of K.C. Mahindra Education Trust for one year's education. Please do send me progress reports and a photograph. ☐ Instead of one Nanhi Kali, I would like to adopt \_\_\_\_\_ Nanhi Kalis for \_\_\_\_\_ years. Thank you.

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Take a deep look into Julie's eyes.

What do you see fifteen years from now? The caring eyes of a field nurse or the blank eyes of a prostitute. The truth is, it could be either, and it depends on you. Through Nanhi Kali, you can become the foster parent of a little girl like Julie. By giving Rs. 100 a month towards her education. Your 'daughter' will be put into school and in fact, you will receive regular reports about her progress including a photograph.

Nanhi Kali is a special project of the K.C. Mahindra Education Trust - a trust set up by one of the most reputed industrial families in India. A trust that's been working since 1953 to promote education and enlightenment across the country. Since Nanhi Kali literally means 'little flower', with the help of people like you, we hope to repair the broken petals of thousands of such underprivileged little girls. So please, look into Julie's eyes and make up your mind, now.

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A smile. A teardrop. A raised eyebrow.  
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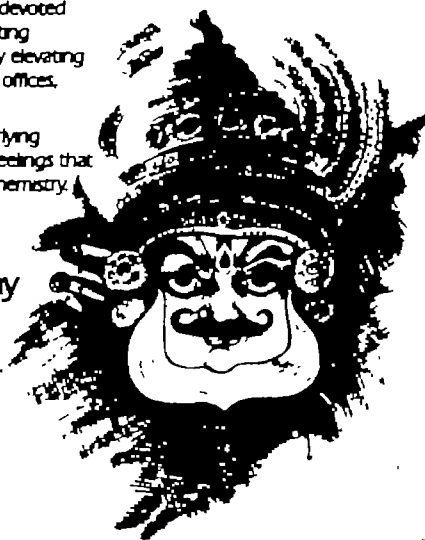
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'We are the Pilgrims, master;  
we should go always a little further;  
it may be beyond the last mountain  
barred with snow across  
that angry or that glimmering sea.....'



29th July, 1904 – 29th November, 1993

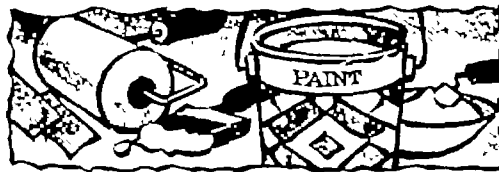
J.R.D. Tata was fond of this poem by James Elroy Flecker, indeed he was the very embodiment of it. Today, we reaffirm our commitment to his vision. And we will go a little further, beyond the last blue mountain..



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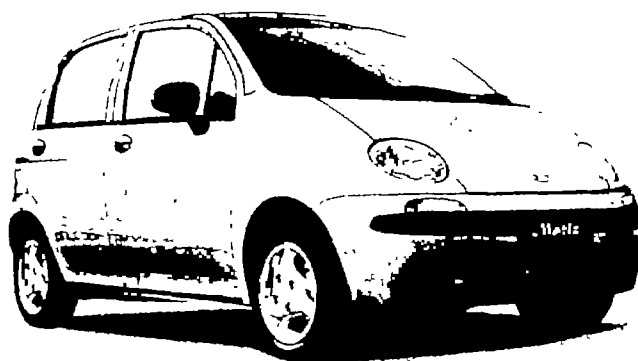
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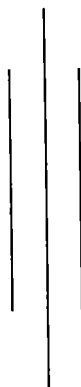
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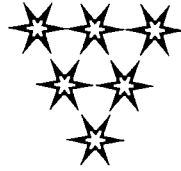
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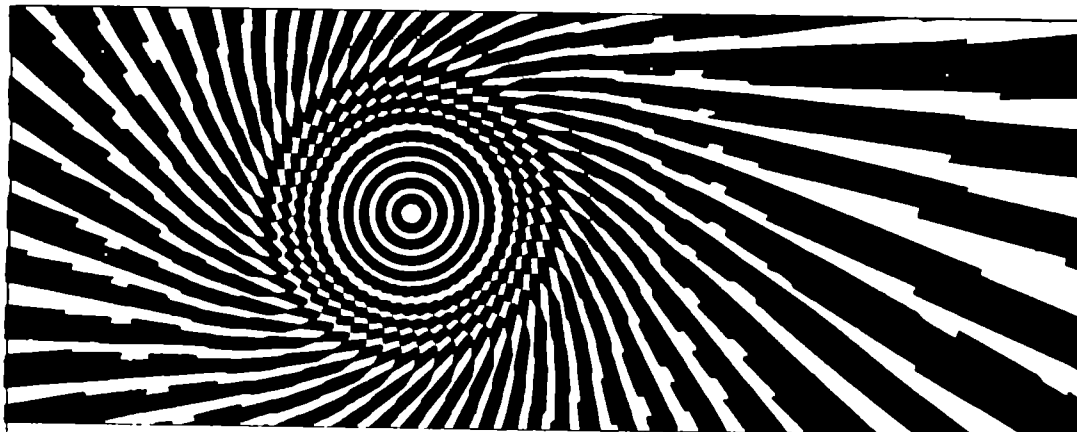
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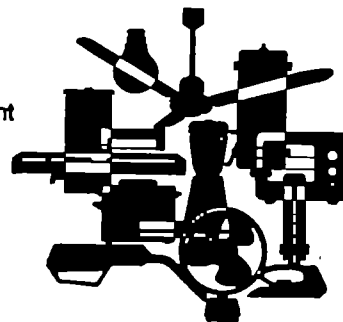
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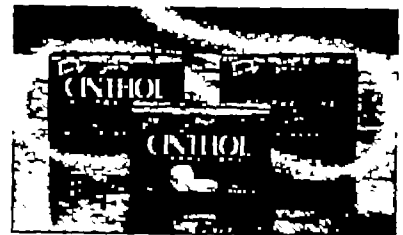
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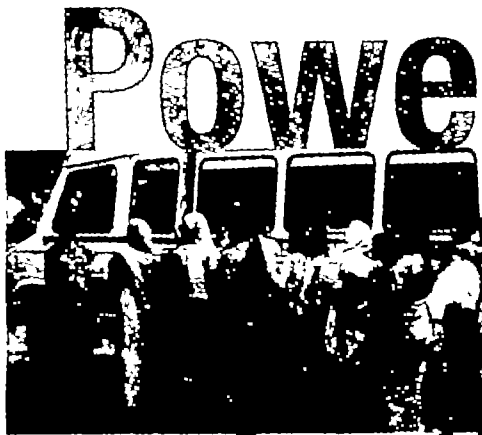


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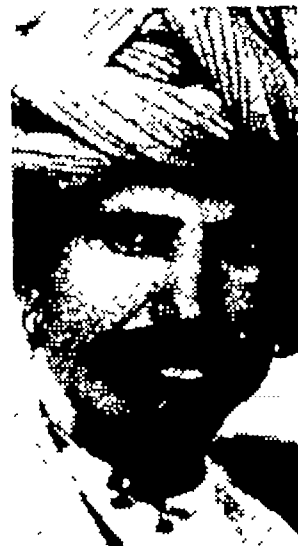
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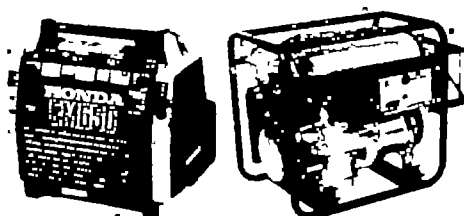
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# Deeper but unfinished

ASHUTOSH VARSHNEY

LET us imagine an analytic conversation. If one asked Robert Dahl (1998, 1991, 1971), the world's leading democratic theorist since the Second World War, what he thought of Indian democracy today, what would he say? What do five Indian elections in ten years since 1989, and their content, illustrate, symbolize, or show?

Dahl would argue that India has become a mature democracy, though he would add that it has room for greater maturity. Stated differently, India's democracy is deeper than it used to be, but several democratic battles remain. On what basis can we say that it is deeper? And why is it unfinished?

India's democracy is deeper because it satisfies, more than ever before, two principal criteria of democratic theory: contestation and participation. By contestation, democratic theory means the freedom with which those in power are challenged in elections; and participation indicates how large a segment of the nation's population takes part in elections, and especially whether the previously excluded do.

Let us first look at contestation in India. In the last ten years, India has had five national elections and government has changed hands four times: 1989, 1991, 1996 and 1998. In the 1999 elections, the incumbents

have won for the first time since 1984, but that is only the visible tip of the iceberg. As we dig deeper, we find that more than fifty per cent incumbents – 276 out of 541 – lost their seats. Such results are impossible unless contestation is remarkably free.

What about participation? Despite the widespread prediction of voter apathy, the third election in three years registered a 59.5 per cent turnout. It appears that turnout in India has stabilized around 60 per cent, which by international standards is very high and given the frequency of elections in India, impressive. Weather and dramatic issues increase, or reduce, the turnout by a mere 1-2 percentage points.

More importantly, the social base of participation has distinctly shifted downwards – towards the countryside and the lower castes. Keeping up the trend inaugurated in 1989, the turnout in villages this time was 9 per cent higher than in urban India (about 61 per cent compared to roughly 52 per cent), the odds of a scheduled caste citizen voting were 2.3 per cent higher than the national average, and the biggest increases in voting rates took place in the tribal constituencies. If there is any apathy towards voting, it is in India's larger cities and in their more affluent parts: Golf Links, Sundar Nagar and Vasant Vihar in Delhi, for example.

There is another conceptual way of summarizing India's democratic record. It has what might be called a democratic surplus. Using an eco-

\* This article is based on a recent talk given at the Asia Society, New York. Some of the arguments are developed at length in my 'Is India Becoming More Democratic?', *Journal of Asian Studies*, forthcoming, February 2000



nomic analogy, one can say that democracy in India has become a *stock* variable; it is no longer a *flow* variable. Most stable democracies in the world happen to be the rich industrialized countries, where military coups or civilian suspensions of democracy do not take place; hence the basic features of the polity remain more or less unchanged. In poorer countries where military coups can fundamentally alter the properties of the polity, as currently in Pakistan, democracy tends to be a flow variable. It can have huge ups and downs. India is poor but it has a stable democracy. All political, military and civilian actors believe that elections are the only way to rise to power. That is why democratic theorists recognize India as a striking exception to democratic theory: what it has politically achieved at low levels of income is what only richer countries have. It has broken the strong association between affluence and stable democracy.

**A** view of Indian democracy that so heavily relies on elections, and contestation and participation therein, is heavily criticized in some intellectual quarters, especially on the left, both traditional and postmodern. For intellectuals within this tradition, India's democracy is a sham. In Jalal (1995), we have the most detailed statement of this view, though softer versions can also be found in Bonner (1994), Brass (1990), and Vanaik (1990).

According to this view, changes at the level of elections and elected institutions are of little consequence so long as the social and economic inequalities of civil society remain unaltered, and the non-elected state institutions – especially the bureaucracy and police – continue to act in an authoritarian manner vis-à-vis the citizens, much as they used to when the British ruled. For democracy to func-

tion in a *real*, not *formal*, sense, there has to be greater prior equality among its citizens. A deeply unequal society can't check the authoritarian functioning of the state structures and therefore can't have a polity that is 'really' democratic.

'Democratic authoritarianism', Jalal argues, is the best way to describe India's polity and there are, she says, no fundamental differences between India and Pakistan, except at the level of political superstructure. Both have profound socio-economic inequalities and both have inherited insensitive, colonial state structures in which the non-elected institutions easily trump the elected powers-that-be:

'The simple dichotomy between democracy in India and military authoritarianism in Pakistan ... collapses as soon as one delves below the surface phenomena of political processes. (P)ost-colonial India and Pakistan exhibit alternate forms of authoritarianism. The nurturing of the parliamentary form of government through the meticulous observance of the ritual of elections in India enabled a partnership between the political leadership and the non-elected institutions of the state to preside over a democratic authoritarianism.' (Jalal, pp. 249-50).

**T**hus, even when meticulously observed, elections are basically a 'ritual'. At best, they combine 'formal democracy and covert authoritarianism' (p. 99). If societies are unequal, the poor will inevitably be manipulated by the political elite:

'Unless capable of extending their voting rights beyond the confines of the institutionalized electoral arenas to an effective struggle against social and economic exploitation, legal citizens are more likely to be handmaids of powerful political manipulators than autonomous agents deriving

concrete rewards from democratic processes.' (Jalal, p. 48)

**I**n its theoretical anchorage, we should note, this kind of reasoning is not new. Commonly associated with Marx, Lenin, Gramsci, Mosca and Pareto, it has a long lineage lasting over a century. The arguments of Gramsci and Mosca are the most elaborate. Gramsci (1971) reasoned that so long as the economically powerful had control over the cultural means of a society – its newspapers, its education, its arts – they could establish a hegemony over the subaltern classes and essentially obfuscate the subalterns about their own interests. And Mosca (1939) argued that in democracies, given their many inequalities, domination of a small elite is inevitable.

Should we, then, consider socio-economic equality a precondition for democracy? In the leading texts of democratic theory (Dahl, 1998, 1989, and 1971), the two basic criteria of democracy – contestation and participation – do not require socio-economic equality; they may affect, or be affected by, inequality. Democratic theorists expect that if socially or economically unequal citizens are politically equalized and if the deprived constitute a majority of the electorate, their political preferences would, sooner or later, be reflected in who the rulers are and what public policies they adopt. By giving everyone equal vote irrespective of prior resource-endowments, universal franchise creates the potential mechanisms for undermining vertical dependence of the deprived over the privileged. In Europe, labour parties pushing for worker's interests emerged in politics once franchise was extended to the working class.

Another well-known theoretical point is germane to a discussion of

inequalities and democracy. If inequality, despite democratic institutions, comes in the way of a free expression of political preferences, such inequality makes a polity *less* democratic, but it does not make it *undemocratic*. So long as contestation and participation are available, democracy is a *continuous* variable (expressed as 'more or less'), not a *dichotomous* variable (expressed as 'yes or no'). Variations in degree and dichotomies should be clearly distinguished.

In the classic formulation of Robert Dahl, the United States was less of a democracy before the civil rights revolution of the mid-1960s, though it can in future be even more democratic if inequalities at the level of civil society come down further (Dahl, 1971, p. 29). Similarly, by allowing a great deal of contestation but restricting participation according to gender and class, England in the 19th century was less democratic than it is today, but it was democratic nonetheless, certainly by 19th century standards. *Given contestation and participation, greater equality certainly makes a polity more democratic, but greater equality, in and of itself, does not constitute democracy.* There is no democracy without elections.

I should add that the claims above are empirical, not normative. They are not a defence of inequalities, nor do they imply that having universal franchise is better than having equality. Relative economic equality, for example, may well be a value in itself, and we may wish to defend it as such. But we should note that economic equality and democracy are distinct categories. Societies with high levels of economic equality may well be quite authoritarian. South Korea and Taiwan until the late 1980s, China under Mao, and Singapore today come to mind. And societies with con-

siderable economic inequality may have vibrant democracies: India and the US are both believed to have a Gini Coefficient of 0.4-0.45, as opposed to a more equal Gini Coefficient of 0.2-0.25 for the pre-1985 and authoritarian South Korea and Taiwan.<sup>1</sup> Precisely because economic equality and democracy are analytically distinct, some people may quite legitimately be democrats but not believers in economic equality; others may believe in democracy as well as economic equality; and still others may be democrats but indifferent to the question of economic equality. A similar argument can also be made about social inequalities.

In light of the theoretical discussion above, what can we say about India. Has Indian democracy become more inclusive or not? And hasn't greater inclusion reduced social, if not economic, inequalities? In case *social* inequalities have come down as a consequence of the political process, it will, in the theoretical terms proposed above, make India *more* democratic, even though an inability to reduce *economic* inequalities will not make India's polity *undemocratic*.

Let us begin with a brief comparison of the caste composition of Indian politics today with the situation soon after independence. In the 1950s, India's national politics was dominated by English-speaking and urban politicians trained in law. Most politicians came from the upper castes, and many leaders were trained abroad. Lower down the political hierarchy, an agrarian and 'vernacular' elite dominated local and state politics (Weiner,

1962), but even the lower-level political leadership tended to come from the upper castes in North India.

South India was different. Southern politicians were not only 'vernacular' but, as the 1950s evolved, they were also increasingly from the lower castes (Hardgrave, 1965; Subramaniam, 1999). By the 1960s, much of South India had gone through a relatively peaceful lower caste revolution: the DMK came to power in Tamil Nadu as an anti-Brahmin party in the 1960s, and the Communist party, first in power in Kerala in 1957, was primarily based in the Ezhava community, a low caste of traditional toddy-tappers (Nqssiter, 1982).<sup>2</sup>

In the 1980s and 1990s, a southern style plebeian politics has rocked North India. The names of Mulayam Singh Yadav, Laloo Yadav, Kanshi Ram and Mayawati – all 'vernacular' politicians who have risen from below – repeatedly make headlines. They are not united. Nonetheless, these and other lower caste leaders often make or break coalitions in power. Their total vote share continues to be lower than that for the Congress and BJP respectively, but it is enough to force concessions from the two largest parties. In the three national elections held between 1996 and 1999, the various parties explicitly representing lower castes, in the aggregate, received between 18 to 20 per cent of the national vote, as against 20-25 per cent for the BJP, and 23-29 per cent for the Congress party.<sup>3</sup>

2 In the two other South Indian states, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, a lower caste thrust in politics, though present, has been less pronounced.

3 Based on the Election Commission, 1996, pp. 40-51, and Election Commission, 1998, pp. 49-56. The 1999 data are provisional. The explicitly lower-caste parties are, JD (various versions), RJD, SP, BSP, JP, ADMK, DMK, MDMK, PMK, BJD, and RPI.

1 The Gini Coefficient ranges between 0 and 1. The closer a country is to 1, the more unequal it is. Given similar Gini Coefficients, countries with higher per capita incomes (USA) would have far less poverty than those with lower per capita incomes (India).

Thus, disunity at the level of political *parties* notwithstanding, lower-caste *politics* has come to stay.<sup>4</sup> It has, as often noted, not only introduced a new colouring of phrases, diction and styles in politics, but also pressed the polity in new policy directions. An enlarged affirmative action programme and an emerging restructuring of the power structure on the ground – street-level bureaucracies and police stations – are by far the most striking substantive success of such politicians. An extra 27 per cent reservation for the lower castes to central government jobs and educational seats has been both added by Delhi and approved by the Supreme Court. In the 1950s, only 22.5 per cent of such jobs were reserved, and more than three-fourths were openly competitive. Today, these proportions are 49.5 and 50.5 per cent respectively. At the state level, of course, the OBC quotas have been higher for a long time in southern India.

Indian politics thus has a new lower caste thrust, now prevalent both in the North as well as the South. Democracy has been substantially indigenized, and the shadow of Oxbridge has left India's political centre-stage. All of this is a clear sign of declining *social* inequalities, though we do not yet have very good data on whether *economic* inequalities have also gone down.

None of the above should be construed to mean that India cannot be made still more democratic. There is no doubt that many battles for social dignity and equality for the lower castes still lie ahead, even in South

India; and so do struggles for women and minorities. The emerging hostility between the upper OBCs and scheduled castes in several parts of the country is another example of an unfinished social transformation. However, there is no doubt left that democracy has already energized India's plebeian orders. They have challenged the traditional forms of clientelistic politics and started fighting for greater power. As a consequence, India's democracy is deeper, but many democratic battles still remain.

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4 In the 1999 elections, it was widely predicted that the lower-caste parties in the North would be dealt a serious blow by the electorate. In UP, SP and BSP increased their share of seats, even as their votes marginally declined, in Bihar, RJD kept its vote share intact, but lost seats due to the BJP's superior coalition-making strategy.

# Hamara Vajpayee

HARISH KHARE

THE central problem – and the great puzzle – of the Indian political landscape today can be stated simply: Why has Atal Bihari Vajpayee suddenly become so widely acceptable? After all it is the same Vajpayee who has been around for over forty years, it is the same Ataljee who has been enticing crowds with his golden oratory election after election. But of late he has been proclaimed as the most acceptable ‘leader’, even as the crowds have got smaller and smaller.

What is more mystifying is that he has given no evidence of becoming a more sagacious or wiser a leader than he was, say, a decade ago; nor has he done anything that can be remotely described as courageous, charismatic or intrepid. He is not getting any younger; if anything, signs of old age are evident and all too visible, particularly in this age of telegenic glamour. All in all, his has been a painfully ordinary political career.

Yet Vajpayee has been successfully projected as the ‘able’ leader, sold as the super-shaman, the man with prescriptions, answers and inspirations for our collective ills, infirmities and doubts. Above all, he has been

marketed as the man above party loyalties.

The success of this ‘*Hamara Vajpayee*’ campaign is as puzzling as is it revealing. After all, if there is little evidence of the ‘product’ having become any better, has, then, the political market changed? And, if so, has it changed so dramatically as to develop a liking for a man who was rejected all these years? Or, have the marketeers become better at their craft of persuasion and conversion? Has Vajpayee changed, or, evolved, if you prefer? Or, has his party, the Bharatiya Janata Party changed? Or, has India changed? Or, has the political space and discourse been disproportionately appropriated by a new set of interests and individuals who have found in Vajpayee the perfect saleable mascot.

A few inter-related propositions can be offered as providing the contextual background for the success of the ‘*Hamara Vajpayee*’ project. First, the slow incubation of the post-1991 economic reforms process, which saw the leadership of our elites passing from political hands into those of the business classes. This change of lead-

ership of the elites was of course predicated on the end of the Cold War, collapse of the Soviet paradigm, apparent inevitability of globalization, and the American hegemony in the international arena

**S**econd, this newly empowered business leadership was truly startled by the de-institutionalization of political power at the centre, an unsettling process that began in the last years of the Narasimha Rao regime and continued unchecked during the two spells of the United Front governments. For all the talk of 'inevitability of the coalition era', the need for a strong and stable government was not lost on the dominant economic forces and their drum-beaters.

Third, the precipitous decline of the Congress party as a centrist and inclusive political organization, and the fact that the decline looked irreversible once the leadership passed into the hands of the foreign-born Sonia Gandhi. The entirely surreptitious manner in which Sonia Gandhi ousted Sitaram Kesri (the first Congress president from the bania community in a long, long time) from the leadership, overnight alienated the traditional business communities from the Sonia Congress.

And, last, there emerged slowly but surely a pan-Indian middle class. It is this new pan-Indian middle class that has facilitated the fusion of the three developments into a combustible and potent mix, catapulting 'Hamara Vajpayee' to the pinnacle of glory and power.

The most dramatic development of the 1990s, then, was the convergence of the above four factors which produced for Vajpayee an acceptability that had so far been denied to anyone from outside the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty. What is more, Vajpayee has acquired and retained an all-India fol-

lowing, despite being challenged by someone putatively from the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty. And yet, what is interesting is that he is exactly the opposite of Rajiv Gandhi who was the first icon of the middle classes and who began the process of opening up the Indian economy even before the 1991 Manmohan Singh-Narasimha Rao initiative

Rajiv was young, handsome, with a beautiful and elegant wife; he was apolitical, technology-oriented and totally unencumbered with the memories of the national struggle. Towards the end of his regime, Rajiv was paid a handsome tribute by the Financial Times of London: 'Whatever the failings of the Rajiv administration, it has earned its place in history as the government that brought about the shift in direction of post Independence economic and industrial policies, away from self-sufficiency and import-substitution and towards a framework which is more market-oriented and outward looking.'

**D**espite all this mortgaging of his soul to the middle classes' political preference, Rajiv Gandhi could not retain their affection, partly because these very segments were upset with both his political arrogance and the creeping Marcosism of his regime. Also, the vast expansion of television proved the undoing of the Rajiv regime at the election time in 1989: the masses saw for themselves the difference between the claims made on behalf of middle class oriented consumerism and their own unmitigated poverty

After the V.P. Singh-Chandra Shekhar interlude came the P.V. Narasimha Rao years. But the business and middle classes were not greatly impressed as the Telugu *Bidda* seemed incapable of checking the

marauding lumpens of the Ayodhya movement just as he seemed unwilling to control the greed and corruption among his personal and political cronies. The Deve Gowda regime and the I.K. Gujral phenomenon were unnatural arrangements, inherently unable to meet the requirements of the newly empowered business elites and their compradores in the pan-Indian middle class. What was more, the Indian business elites needed the protection of a reasonably strong state against the demands of competition from foreign capital and investors who were muscling their way into Indian markets in the name of globalization.

**T**he central task, then, was to find a new political dispensation which, besides attending to and repairing the efficacy of the Indian state, would also be willing to protect the business interests of the so-called entrepreneurs as well as to satisfy the cravings and aspirations of the new pan-Indian middle class. And the task was undertaken in right earnest by inventing new *mantras*: 'politics is bad', 'there is too much politics', 'politics is a hindrance to growth', 'populism is dangerous', 'investors' confidence is a must'.

The judiciary was encouraged to take on the political class; the bureaucracy was bad-mouthed; demands were voiced for 'de-regulation' and 'de-bureaucratization'. It was simply deemed bad manners to talk of the poor. Atal Bihari Vajpayee fitted in rather well in this new calculus, even as his comrade, Lal Krishna Advani went about presiding over demolition's of mosques, when he was otherwise not busy inciting frenzied crowds to go after the Muslims.

The business communities were simply becoming too nervous about recurrent demands for empowerment from the Mayawatis and the Kanshi Rams. India was deemed to be in the

1. 20 December 1988

grip of a crisis of governability. There was too much disorder for the business leaders' taste. Someone finally decided to buy peace by putting the rioters in charge of the police stations.

Once Advani declared that Vajpayee would be the BJP's prime ministerial candidate, the BJP of Vajpayee became the business community's preferred instrument of control. An opinion poll, on the eve of the 1998 elections, found Vajpayee enjoying a 'A+' rating among 55% of the CEOs of the country. Corporate India had found its man.

**A** reasonable judgement about the political economy of chaos and disorder that emerged out of the clash of Mandal, masjid/mandir and market, noted: 'The response of the upper castes (which constitute between 20 to 25% of the population), including sections of the traditionally stoic business and commercial elites, has been to gravitate towards the formerly obscure pro-Hindu national BJP, whose commitment to "good governance" and "traditional values", not to mention its goal of transferring India into an ascetic and disciplined Hindu nation-state, has struck a particular chord with the "besieged" upper castes and the propertied classes, especially in the Hindi-speaking heartland.'<sup>2</sup>

While the Indian state was deliberately challenged and weakened and the political class was sought to be de-legitimized, a post-economic reforms middle class was evolving into a pan-Indian reality. Without the evolution of a pan-Indian middle class, the business leadership by itself would have been unable to create the magic halo around Vajpayee. And it was this pan-Indian middle class that

opted to repose faith in Vajpayee as the only viable leader capable of pushing their agenda of greed and selfishness, that provided the requisite cadres, ideas, energy and innovation for the success of the 'Hamara Vajpayee' campaign even beyond the Hindi-speaking heartland.

**W**hile estimates of the size of the 'Indian middle class' have tended to be exaggerated (though of late an element of sobriety has crept in), what has not received requisite appreciation is the evidence of a homogeneity in lifestyle preferences and prejudices. Two factors – both products of the explosion and penetration of television, and later of the cable revolution – have contributed to this pan-Indianness. First, the advertising community invented a new, all-comprehensive India as the staging arena for a giant market. It is possible to argue that the MNCs are looking at India with unblinkered eyes, that the MNC's advertisers are not bothered with caste antagonism and regional animosities, with memories of historic slights and other backward-looking grievances.

Instead, the advertisers for MNCs, used as they are to different languages and cultural sensitivities, brought to their job in India a new proclivity to regional tastes and tapped into local passions to garner respectability for their products. Advertising gurus began telling their juniors to be equally attuned to rural tastes and preferences. A survey of marketing requirement of the new brands summed up the homogenizing impact of television, especially satellite, to small towns like Guwahati, Baroda, Ludhiana, Indore, Quilon, among others: 'With satellite TV shovelling hi-life images down small-town throats, suddenly the attitudinal gap between metros and small towns India is disappearing.'

And, second, the hitherto enamoured of regional cultural mores and traditions, the middle classes in the metro cities and other urban areas, began seeking aspirations from the same source of moral and cultural values: the West. The pan-Indianness of the middle classes stems from a homogeneous craving for status and respectability, an acceptability from global company provided by a globalized economy. As Shobha De puts it, 'This is the first generation of global kids with international reference points.' Emboldened by his new global company and global brand names, the new pan-Indian middle class man is unapologetic about his lifestyle.

**A** survey of status symbols of the adult male concluded. 'He belongs to a tribe that is unique in its aggressive pursuit of trappings of success. He has done two things very effectively. One, buried the collective guilt of a *manuvadi* past. Two, made the most of a growing economy to get a bank balance full of New Money. He has earned, not inherited it – which he takes as a moral license to flaunt success. His tribe is growing fast.' There is no stopping now for this culturally assertive new middle class. So much so that one of India's leading magazines even saluted, without any trace of disapproval, the use of cocaine by the rich. 'The deceptive glamour drug is quickly becoming the with-it statement in Mumbai... earlier losers used drugs, now winners do coke to stay cool and stay ahead.'<sup>3</sup>

This hedonism is not confined to the megarich end of the band. The television medium has, it seems, been assigned the role of celebrating the lifestyle of the rich; tele-dramas are being scripted to garner acceptability for extramarital relationships, *badla*

2. Shailendra Sharma, *Development and Democracy in India*. Lynn-Reinner Publishers, Boulder, Colorado, 1999, pp. 9-10.

3. *A & M*, 9 May 1997

(vendetta), family feuds, business rivalries. Everyone in these televised dramas seems to have opulent homes, expensive clothes, elegant women, and not a care in the world; there is never any hint as to who is bringing the moolah home. Concern for the poor or respect for lower middle class aspirations and insecurities are conspicuously absent.

**W**hat is redeeming about the new middle class, especially its younger segment, is that despite its global connections, it remains nationally anchored. There is national self assurance to compete globally, to test one's mettle in the global market and arena. A survey, for example, found 51% of young consumers in New Delhi and Mumbai actively supporting the *swadeshi* credo of 'Be Indian, buy Indian.'

The designers of the 'Hamara Vajpayee' campaign have cleverly tapped into this mix of greed, globalism and nationalism. Once Vajpayee proclaimed that 'I dream of a strong and prosperous India,' it was possible to market him to even unfamiliar parts and constituencies in the country. The cockiness of the new generation was sought to be converted into a national outlook.

For example, Vajpayee's finance minister, Yashwant Sinha, said in December 1998: 'Nuclear tests were *swadeshi* because they made India powerful. Now, India must be a powerful economic nation to match its military might, and the only way you can become an economic power is by being able to test your strengths against others. Which means going out into the world and competing or letting the world come in and compete. It is not from hiding from the world, but by going out and meeting the world that we can compete.... After the nuclear tests, to think that we

will go the East India Co. way or that transnationals will come in and take over, or that they will exercise undue influence, that foreign investments should be resisted – these are all concepts which are not valid any more.'<sup>4</sup>

This cockiness – with Vajpayee as its national symbol – got consecrated in Kargil. The conflict produced a remarkable synergy between Corporate India, Media India and Mass India. A cursory glance at the various 'internet' polls conducted by newspapers and television – and which were deemed to be reflective of the national mood – revealed an unapologetic itch for militarization, for glorification of the war machine, for a corporate agenda and against democratic dissent and discussion. For example, 77% wanted India to cross the Line of Control to achieve the goal of evicting infiltrators from Kargil; 66% were against a special session of the Rajya Sabha (as favoured by Opposition parties and the President of India) to debate the Kargil issue; 74% thought the Opposition did not play a constructive role; 91% approved of Vajpayee's decision to decline Clinton's invitation for talks in Washington; 65% disapproved of the President's opposition to the 'telecom package' and so on.<sup>5</sup>

**I**f the Kargil conflict revealed the connected internet generation's nationalistic chauvinism, its craving for a spot of bullying, intolerance for democracy and contempt for accountability, it also revealed how easy it was for a tiny elite to work up the entire country towards a particular mood.<sup>6</sup> More than anything, the Kargil con-

flict was the new middle class' finest hour. And it was this mood that was reworked to produce a bare majority for the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led National Democratic Alliance in the 1999 general election.

**E**mboldened by their two recent successes – the selling of the Kargil conflict, and setting the terms of political debate in the 1999 general election – the masterminds behind the 'Hamara Vajpayee' campaign have hijacked the new government. Since 13 October 1999 when the new Vajpayee government took oath of office, it has behaved as if it has to only worry about the chambers of commerce; the prime minister and his ministers have travelled to the gathering of businessmen and entrepreneurs to make 'pro-growth' announcements. A Confederation of Indian Industry factsheet, dated 4 December 1999, simply noted: 'Government policy decisions have remained in line with "second-generation reforms", and several steps that have been taken represent unpopular, but necessary, moves.'

Atal Bihari Vajpayee has now been truly appropriated by the pan-Indian middle class, even though the evidence suggests that the size of the 'middle class' may not be as large as was estimated in the early 1990s. Nor did the 1999 election produce evidence of any overwhelming popular support for 'Hamara Vajpayee'. Yet, national policy-making has been taken over by corporate India and its apologists in the electronic and print media. This appropriation of a disproportionate share in the decision-making and the consequent de-legitimization of the 'pro-poor' concerns constitutes the final success of the 'Hamara Vajpayee' campaign.

4 Interview to *Business Today*, 22 January 1999

5. These are cited from *The Times of India* internet polls during the Kargil conflict

6 See Hansh Khare, 'After the Kargil Cup Fever', *The Hindu*, 14 July 1999; and, 'Beyond

the War-drummers' Agenda', *The Hindu*, 28 July 1999.

# Bofors' ghost

VIR SANGHVI

THIRTEEN years after it broke, the Bofors scandal shows no signs of going away. In 1987, Rajiv Gandhi's advisors had assured him that Bofors was a middle class preoccupation which would have no impact on the country at large. In 1989, these advisors were proved wrong when the Congress lost the election largely because of Bofors. In 1990 and 1991, the new government headed by V.P. Singh was obsessed by Bofors. Letter Rogatories were sent to Switzerland, assorted investigators made several trips between Delhi and Geneva and much noise was generated. But nothing came of the investigations.

In 1991, when the Narasimha Rao government took over and asked the CBI to go slow on Bofors, most people assumed that we had heard the last of the scandal. But no, within a year, Bofors claimed another victim. Foreign Minister Madhavsinh Solanki handed over a note to the Swiss authorities calling for a halt to the investigation. The details of the note leaked and Solanki was forced into political oblivion from which he has never recovered.

Over the years, Bofors has continued to flare up from time to time. An investigative story in *The Indian Express* in the mid-1990s forced Ottavio Quatrocchi to flee the country, one step ahead of the CBI. When H.D. Deve Gowda took over as prime minister, his hand-picked CBI chief, 'Tiger' Joginder Singh acted as though he would solve the Bofors case

single-handed and made the, by now statutory, pilgrimage to Zurich and Geneva. Two years later, Bofors hit the headlines again, this time, not because of the scandal but because the guns themselves proved to be such a success during the Kargil conflict. Most recently, the Vajpayee government has filed a Bofors chargesheet which has generated its own share of controversy because it names Rajiv Gandhi among the accused. Congressmen stopped the Lok Sabha from functioning for several days and even now the issue threatens cooperation between the government and the Opposition.

When you consider the total amount involved in the Bofors kick-backs, you begin to realise how much we have upped the ante when it comes to corruption. By today's standards, Rs 64 crore is peanuts. Every single scam that has come to light over the last five years has concerned hundreds of crores: Rs 64 crore is probably equal to the kind of profit that any of the accused in the securities scam made in an average week.

So why is it that Bofors exercises this hold over the national imagination? Why is it the scandal that won't go away?

The exact sequence of events that led to the Bofors scandal is probably worth repeating if only because most people have forgotten what really happened.

The Indian Army decided during Indira Gandhi's reign that it



needed a howitzer. Various arms manufacturers approached India and the army began a long and exhaustive process of weapons testing. This process was still continuing when Indira Gandhi died and Rajiv took over. By then, there were two clear favourites among the weapons: the French gun Sofma and the Swedish Bofors howitzer. Both guns had their champions and their detractors. Within the army it was widely believed – though never substantiated – that competing manufacturers had paid off assorted generals and this accounted for the different opinions.

The Rajiv government attempted to speed up the process of selection, but also, took the unusual step of declaring that it would not deal with the agents of arms manufacturers. Signs were put up in the defence ministry to the effect that agents would not be allowed to meet any officials. As an agent is an integral part of any buying and selling process, it was never explained why this decision had been taken.

**H**owever, it was generally held in Delhi that this was part of a new election funding scheme evolved by Rajiv Gandhi and his two principal advisors, Arun Singh and Arun Nehru. Apparently, Rajiv and the two Aruns had tired of the traditional method of raising electoral financing: selling licenses in the marketplace or accepting contributions from dodgy businessmen who wanted to be forgiven their income tax or foreign exchange violations. Their solution was to zero in on the vast purchases made by the public sector, including the armed forces.

They calculated that hundreds of crores were paid to agents as commissions on these purchases every year. Supposing the Government of India asked sellers to sack their agents and

to pass their commissions to the Congress party under the table? Such an arrangement had several advantages. One: the commissions would be paid by whoever got the contracts, they would not be paid to influence the award of the contract. So, India would continue to get the best goods. And two, if you sold licenses in the marketplace, you compromised on industrial development and had to cope with assorted industrialists who felt that you owed them favours. This way, you would never need to see the foreign buyers again and there would be no sense of having accepted a bribe.

**T**he morality of this arrangement was always dubious. But its defenders claimed that it was a matter of choosing between lesser evils. Elections had to be fought. Money was always required. Wasn't it better to raise the funds this way than to accept bribes from the Indian industrial class?

When arms manufacturers were asked to fire their agents, most made a show of complying with this directive, though many merely reorganised the relationship. In the case of Bofors, for instance, its agent was a company called Anatronics run by a bluff Punjabi arms dealer named Win N. Chaddha. Once Bofors was asked to sack Chaddha, it reworked the arrangement so that he was no longer working on a commission basis. Instead, Anatronics was hired for a fixed amount to function as Bofors consultant in India. Nobody was sure whether the directive banning agents from the defence ministry applied to consultants as well. And there is evidence that Chaddha continued to function – for all practical purposes – as Bofors' agent in India.

By the time the army had to make its final selection, there were two clear lobbies among the generals. General Sundarji, apparently with the

backing of Arun Singh, chose Bofors, which he said had a 'shoot-and-scoot' capability (it could be moved after it had fired) which Sofma lacked. The Sofma supporters questioned Sundarji's judgement and dropped dark hints as to his motives. What is certain is that the selection process moved rapidly through the final lap and that the army headquarters chose Bofors. The Rajiv Gandhi government took just 24 hours to endorse that recommendation and the contract went to Bofors.

While the Sofma lobby was unhappy with the decision, it caused no great stir in India. Bofors, on the other hand, was in serious financial difficulty and the award of the contract was regarded as the deal that saved the company. The Indian flag flew over Bofors' headquarters and Win Chaddha threw a party to celebrate at Delhi's Maurya hotel. The entire banquet hall was festooned with banners which read: 'Win wins again.' Chaddha, no shrinking violet at the best of times, assured guests that 'My family is now set up for generations.'

**N**othing happened till the spring of 1987, when Swedish Radio, which was investigating the Bofors company, revealed that Bofors had paid bribes to secure the Indian deal. This announcement created a mild stir in India, largely because there was already a controversy over another defence deal (the HDW submarine deal). But the Opposition scented blood when the Rajiv Gandhi government suddenly began to overreact. Instead of simply denying the charge of corruption, it made the wholly unnecessary claim that there could be no question of bribes because there had been no agents in the deal. When the charges persisted, the government fell back on a destabilisation theory; the allegations, it said, were part of

a foreign conspiracy to destabilise India. Inevitably, this hysterical over-reaction convinced the Opposition that something was amiss

With the government on the defensive, it became open season. All kinds of irresponsible theories, completely unsupported by any evidence, featured in the press. One version had it that Rajiv's friend, Amitabh Bachchan, had taken the bribe. This was extended by The Indian Express to argue that the bribe had been routed through the non-resident Inlaks group, on the tenuous grounds that Amitabh's sister-in-law had a sister whose husband worked for Inlaks.

Even while these charges were being flung around, The Hindu managed to procure documents suggesting that contrary to Bofors' claims, commissions had been paid. One recipient of these commissions was a company called Pitco.

According to the Bofors files secured by The Hindu, the mailing address for Pitco cheques was 'care of G.P. Hinduja, New Zealand House, Haymarket, London.'

**T**he Hinduja connection gave the saga a new life. The Hinduja's were a controversial, non-resident, Sindhi business family who had already been in the public eye because former defence minister, V.P. Singh, had alleged that they were agents in the HDW submarine deal. Moreover, it had been believed that the Rajiv Gandhi government had banned the Hinduja's from entering into the centres of power. One foreign minister, Baliram Bhagat, had been sacked because he had visited the Hinduja's in London while in office. So how had the Hinduja's swung the Bofors deal?

As the controversy swirled, the Rajiv Gandhi government appointed a joint parliamentary committee (JPC), ostensibly to investigate the matter.

Because the Opposition boycotted the JPC, its report quickly turned into a whitewash. Nevertheless, the JPC did make some interesting revelations. One: Bofors had two agents in India. They were called Pitco (so The Hindu was right all along) and Svenska. According to Bofors, they had terminated the agreements with Pitco and Svenska after the government asked it to sack its agents. Why then did Pitco and Svenska continue to receive money from Bofors? Well, said Bofors, those were winding-up charges for terminating the contract.

**I**f this explanation was unconvincing, then Bofors faced even more difficulty in explaining why it had hired a third agent called AE Services after it had terminated the arrangements with Pitco and Svenska. Finally, the Bofors executives examined by the JPC offered this explanation: we forgot that we weren't supposed to hire agents.

The more anybody with an open mind (excluding the JPC) examined the arrangements with the agents, the more suspicious the hiring of AE Services became. Not only had it been hired while the deal was in its final lap, but it was also supposed to get a commission only if the contract was signed within a particular time frame. By some fortuitous coincidence, the deal was pushed through just before the deadline expired.

By now, The Hindu had printed more documents. These confirmed the original suspicion that Pitco was connected to the Hinduja's. Further, Win Chaddha was the signatory for Svenska. As Svenska received a large chunk of the commission, this caused some eyebrows to be raised. Was Chaddha really worth that much money? (Perhaps this explained why he said that he was set up for generations.) Or was Svenska a slush fund

through which Chaddha accessed the money that Bofors used to pay off generals?

But AE Services remained a mystery. The JPC accepted the Bofors explanation that it was a British firm headquartered in Guildford, Surrey, owned and promoted by a Major Bob Wilson. This was hardly the whole story. I went to Guildford and discovered that AE Services had no office. The address was of a post-box in a solicitor's firm. The total capital of the company was £100 divided into a hundred shares of one pound each. Major Wilson owned one share. The rest were owned by a shadowy Leichtenstein corporation.

For most people in Delhi, the implication was obvious. When the Congress government decided that the army was going to recommend the purchase of Bofors, it asked the company to route its commissions to the party. AE Services was simply a vehicle employed to accept the funds.

But this was supposition. How did one prove it?

**T**he Bofors company appears to have abandoned the traditional arms dealer's dictum that discretion is the better part of commerce. On the one hand, Win Chaddha was garrulous beyond belief. And on the other, the company's president, Martin Ardbo, actually kept a diary in which he noted the details of all his conversations. Worse still, Ardbo persisted with this diary even after the scandal had broken and dutifully noted down the details of the cover-up that Bofors had planned. Inevitably, Swedish Police raided him and confiscated the diary. Just as inevitably, it was then leaked to The Hindu.

To Ardbo's credit, he tried writing the diary in code. Sadly, he employed a code that even a moderately intelligent schoolboy would take

three minutes to crack. For instance, he referred to his partners in managing the cover-up as 'Hansens'. One might have believed that the Hansens were fellow Swedes, except that the diary made it clear that they lived in London and India and that one of them, when he was not described as Hansen, was called GPH. You did not have to be a genius to work out that the Hansens were the Hinduja and that GPH was G.P. Hinduja.

The same applied to the other entries in the diary. Where Ardbo did not use code, he employed bad spelling. Thus, one entry read: 'GPH's enemies are Serge Paul and Nero.' As the Hinduja battle with Arun Nehru and Swaraj Paul was well-known, the implications were obvious. When you got past the code and the bad spelling, the diary made chilling reading. He was meeting, Ardbo wrote, with a 'Gandhi trustee lawyer' to finalise details of the cover-up. Moreover, he no longer cared about 'the consequences for N' (obviously a reference to Arun Nehru) but 'Q's involvement could be a problem because of closeness to R.'

**S**o, who was Q? If R was Rajiv, then Q had to be somebody who was close to him. The Opposition decided that Q was Ottavio Quatrocchi, the Delhi representative of Snamprogetti, the Italian multinational, whose friendship with Rajiv had been a subject of controversy. There were two theories. The first was that Quatrocchi had accepted the money on Rajiv's behalf. The second was that Quatrocchi had acted on his own but had inveigled himself into Bofors' graces by trading on his friendship with Rajiv.

Even as the speculation continued, the Rajiv government fell. The V.P. Singh regime made tall promises but proved unable to make any headway with the Swiss who actually rejected its Letter Rogatory on grounds

that it was badly drafted. Fortunately for Bofors buffs, The Hindu and then The Indian Express (to which The Hindu's Chitra Subramaniam had shifted) kept up the disclosures. But even as these mounted, Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated.

**L**ogically, the Bofors scandal should have ended with Rajiv's assassination. There is a tradition in India that we do not speak ill of the dead. Even if Rajiv had taken money from Bofors, this was now in the past and of no interest to anybody. But such was the power of the Bofors scandal that nothing, not even the assassination, could diminish its lure.

During the Narasimha Rao government, Chitra Subramaniam produced documents suggesting that some of the money that had been paid by Bofors as commissions had been diverted from a Swiss bank account to another account, the ultimate beneficiary of which was Quatrocchi. Even while the CBI debated whether to interrogate him, Quatrocchi skipped the country. He has not set foot in India since then but continues to issue statements from his new home in Kuala Lumpur declaring his innocence.

The Hinduja have also claimed that the whole thing is a frame-up, but their credibility was damaged by the Swiss government's actions. Shortly after the Swiss finally accepted a Letter Rogatory from India, they froze the six bank accounts into which Bofors had paid commissions. The Government of India asked the Swiss to transfer papers relating to those accounts to New Delhi. No, said the Swiss, we have to first deal with appeals from the signatories to those accounts. When one appeal was overturned, the Swiss, in an uncharacteristic breach of bank secrecy, informed the Indian government that they had rejected the appeal filed by G.P. Hinduja and Jubilee Finance.

If the Hinduja are not the signatories to the Bofors accounts, then why were they appealing to prevent the documents from being transferred? The Hinduja explanations have been vague and unconvincing. Meanwhile, the Swiss dismissed appeals filed by Chaddha (who was the signatory to Svenska) and Quatrocchi (who it now seems was behind AE Services) and transferred those papers to India. Only the Hinduja papers are still pending because the family has gone to the Swiss Cabinet for a final appeal. If this appeal is rejected, the documents will be here by Spring 2000.

The Vajpayee government has used the two sets of documents that have been transferred to file a chargesheet in the Bofors case. Controversially, it has named Rajiv Gandhi as an accused, even though he is dead. The government's defence is that as the case has been filed under the Prevention of Corruption Act, it has to prove that the money was transferred to a public servant to demonstrate corruption. It will probably argue in court that Quatrocchi intended to pass on the AE Services money to Rajiv, though how it can possibly prove this is hard to see.

**I**n retrospect, and with the benefit of hindsight, we can probably make sense of what happened in the Bofors affair. According to the copy of the Pitco contract dug up by The Hindu, the Hinduja were appointed Bofors' agents in the late 1970s. This suggests that Bofors followed the traditional system employed by all arms companies. There would be two agents. One would be the official agent – in this case, Win Chaddha through Anatronics and Svenska – who would push Bofors' case and handle the middle-level pay-offs. The second agent would be secret and high level. His job would be to swing the deal at the top level.

This arrangement worked till the Rajiv government asked Bofors to sack its agents. It needed Chaddha to handle the low-level bribing, so it merely reworked the existing arrangement. But all the evidence suggests that the Pitco contract was, in fact, terminated. The Hindujas were out of favour with Rajiv and had nothing to contribute. Because of their long-standing relationship with Bofors – dating back to the Shah's Iran – they were paid what Bofors later called 'termination or winding-up charges.'

**I**t is possible that bribes were paid at the army level to influence the selection of the gun, but there is little doubt that India got the best weapon – the Kargil conflict has proved that. If there is any scope for impropriety, it emerged after the army had decided in principle to go for Bofors and AE Services was hired. Given that Quatrocchi was involved, AE Services was either a front for the Congress party or was a freelance activity of Quatrocchi in his individual capacity.

The worst-case scenario, therefore, is this: the Congress party took a kickback of about Rs 12 crore on an arms transaction in the mid-1980s. Seen in perspective, and with regard to the murky morality of Indian politics, this is not a particularly big deal. Narasimha Rao's government probably made that much money every week. And while in such Rao-era scams as urea, India was cheated, this was a victim-less commission. The army got the best gun, and the AE Services commission was secured by reducing the amount that Bofors would have paid Svenska. If there was a single loser in the whole transaction, it was Win Chaddha who got Rs 12 crore less.

Given all this, why does Bofors continue to exert such a huge hold on the national imagination? Why,

when we think of Rajiv Gandhi, do we always think of Bofors? Why do we not think of corruption the moment Narasimha Rao is mentioned? Why is it that Rajiv's reputation has to live with this taint?

There are no easy answers to these questions. But I think it is safe to say that Bofors would not be such a scandal were it to happen today. The importance of Bofors lies in the fact that it was a scandal that nobody had imagined could happen. For two years before the scandal broke, Rajiv was Mr Clean, the man who was going to transform the Indian political system. When such a man was accused of corruption, it was the equivalent of a vicar being spotted emerging from a brothel. There was a sense of outrage, a sense in which a national betrayal had occurred.

The manner in which Rajiv reacted also contributed to the sense of betrayal. Throughout her tenure, Indira Gandhi was confronted with corruption scandals. But when she was faced with something like the Kuo oil deal, she either ignored the allegations or consigned them to a committee. When nothing else worked, she blamed the CIA.

**I**f you examine Rajiv's responses, he began as you would expect Mr Clean to behave. He was outraged by the allegation; one could argue that he gave it too much importance. Forget about bribes, he said, we didn't even let them hand out commissions. And then, as time went on, he slowly retreated from that Mr Clean response and became his mother's son. The matter was sent to a JPC and the destabilisation theory was trotted out.

I have never been able to work out what it was that made the difference. The Rajiv of early 1987 who banned the Hindujas, was completely different from the Rajiv of 1989 who

had welcomed them back to the prime minister's house. My guess is that Rajiv genuinely believed that he had nothing to hide on Bofors. Within a month or so, he realised that he was wrong; that if the truth came out, he would be severely compromised. That is when his responses began to change, and that is when the Hindujas wormed their way back into his favour by offering to manage Martin Ardbo and to supervise the cover-up from Stockholm and London.

**W**hat was it that Rajiv discovered that so compromised him? It is hard to say, but there are two obvious explanations. The first is that the Congress had taken the commission, but that Rajiv, never a details man, had been unaware of this when he had launched his outraged defence. The second is that it took him a month or two to realise that Quatrocchi was involved. Even if Quatrocchi had been operating in an individual capacity, any revelation that suggested an Italian connection would have severely compromised Rajiv. Sonia would have been the subject of the attack and it is unlikely that he would have been able to face that level of personal assault.

Hence, the turnaround from Mr Outraged Clean to Mr Cover-up. In the process, he destroyed the illusions of a middle class that had blindly supported him and made Bofors a household name. The real reason why Bofors remains a national obsession is not because we got a bad gun or because hundreds of crores changed hands – in fact, we got a good gun and the sum was relatively small. Bofors will always exert a special hold on the national imagination because it was the one scandal that made us lose our innocence and realise that all politicians, no matter how different they may seem are, at the end of the day, just the same.

# Hindutva's 'accursed problem'

MAHESH RANGARAJAN

THE exit of Kalyan Singh from the chief ministership of Uttar Pradesh and from the primary membership of the Bharatiya Janata Party itself was inevitable once it became clear that the Vajpayee-led forces were set to return to power in the general elections. What is significant is that with this one decisive step, the Hindutva movement may well have opened a fresh chapter in its history. The question of questions is whether a new social alliance will now replace it as the premier political force in the province. Much of the answer depends on what now happens, not only within the party ranks or among the legislators in Lucknow, but among the diverse and mutually conflicting elements that constitute its social base.

Only a decade ago, Kalyan Singh was crucial to the success of the party in transforming what latent sympathies existed for its ideological plank in north India into a potent electoral force. From the time of the *rath yatra* of Lal Krishna Advani and

until the eventual demolition of the Babri Masjid, nothing seemed to have gone wrong for the saffron combine in the most populous state in the country. Not only did it emerge as the fastest growing political entity in the various regions of the vast state, it also replaced the Congress and then the various outfits of the Janata *parivar* as the largest political force in U.P. The Mandir even overcame the dissonance created by the implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations in 1990 by the V.P. Singh government.

The new role of the Other Backward Classes within the Hindutva movement found expression in political leaders who combined Mandal and Kamandal – the advocacy of a saffron agenda and the drive for empowering their own communities. Figures like Uma Bharti in Madhya Pradesh and Kalyan Singh in U.P. were critical to the process by which the party grew from being a fringe element in politics into a major force to be reckoned with.

At the same time, as long as the project of the Mandir and all that it symbolised remained on the agenda of the party, it performed a major cementing role.

It was still possible to paper over the obvious discomfort over the ascendancy of the Mandal classes among *savarna* Hindus who had switched *en masse* away from the Congress in the winter of 1989. In electoral terms, the organisation was already dependent on the careful management of these contradictions even in 1991, the only time it ever won a clear majority in the assembly polls. The break-up of the Janata Dal left the erstwhile socialists in disarray, the Bahujan Samaj Party deepened its hold on Dalit voters, and the Congress continued to ebb away as a force on the ground. In the aftermath of the demolition, two key groups led by Mulayam Singh Yadav and Mayawati respectively converged to push back the BJP from its position of pre-eminence.

**T**he verdict of the assembly elections of 1993 pointed to the core dilemma of the BJP. The Ram card had lost its shine and lustre. Even though it still polled over a third of the votes, the Samajwadi-Bahujan Samaj parties with about five per cent fewer votes managed to polarise the electorate at the constituency level. This meant that tactical voting in most of the 425 odd assembly constituencies made a mockery of the claim that a divided opposition would work to the advantage of the group polling the most votes. What is more crucial is that the net votes of the rival parties have since gone up in successive elections, whether to the Lok Sabha or the assembly. Both Mulayam and Mayawati had already emerged stronger by 1996 even though they had gone from being allies to antagonists. The saffron party peaked last year and slipped in 1999.

Its two premier rivals – even the BSP has never had a pre-election accord with it, despite sharing power on two occasions – have gone from strength to strength.

**I**t is not that Kalyan Singh was unaware of the vulnerability of his party. With the rise to prominence of both the Mandal and Dalit groups by the mid-'90s, the very Hindus the Sangh wished to unite were fragmenting and coalescing in a manner that would render its agenda a non-starter. In November 1993 and again in October 1996, he pushed hard for an increased allocation of seats to the Backward Classes. Any accretion of support could only come from such strata. In November 1997, with the collapse of the arrangement with Mayawati's party, he opted to break and split other groups to put together an alliance government. The price that was paid was not a minor one: the temple agenda slipped way down the list of priorities. To add to this, there was a fresh dimension to Kalyan Singh's politics in his second spell in power that was not quite so significant the first time around in 1991-92.

To put this in perspective one needs to look more carefully at the growing tensions between the Mandal and Dalit classes. The emergence of the Bahujan Samaj Party reflected and further crystallised the assertion of the Scheduled Castes who make up over a fifth of the population. As with the Mahars in western India, the Jatavs were in the vanguard of the Dalit-led political formation. Where they succeeded was in uniting their supporters under one flag and bargaining for a better deal.

As chief minister in 1995, Mayawati shrewdly drew on upper caste groups at the helm of the BJP to cut Kalyan Singh to size. Her spell in power, though brief, placed several

issues on the agenda that deepened the divide between the Dalits and the OBCs. In a brief span of two years the BSP had gone from being an ally of the votaries of Mandal to a force able to push forward a distinctively Dalit agenda. The arrangement soon came undone.

The second such experiment in 1997 saw a similar pattern at work. As chief minister in his second spell, Kalyan Singh aggressively identified himself with the empowerment of the OBCs at the cost of *both* the Dalits and the Forward Classes. The latter were his key rivals within the party. The former felt the sharp edge of domination as the government weakened the implementation of protective legislation on human rights. This only reinforced the hold of the Bahujan Samaj Party in its role as a champion of Dalit rights.

**I**n the process, Kalyan Singh became a victim of the very contradictions he tried to bridge. The shift in terrain to caste-based political assertion that was so marked in his own public persona, made it inevitable that he would run afoul of his party. His bid to solidify the hold of the Mandalite groups was now out in the open. The Rani Avantikabai Trust named after an OBC rebel of 1857 seemed to loom larger than the trust set up to build the Ram temple at Ayodhya. This provoked a backlash from the upper caste MLAs. A rough head count of BJP MLAs in U.P. showed that *savarna* Hindus made up about 120 of 176. By the time the general elections drew near, some of Kalyan's supporters, notably the former MP Sakshi Maharaj, left the party.

The general elections saw the party's share of seats fall by half. It fell between two stools – with the Backward votes gravitating to the SP and the FCs to the Congress. The repercus-

sions were not long in coming. In a matter of weeks, Ram Prakash Gupta, an old RSS hand with virtually no popular support or standing, replaced Kalyan Singh. The latter was expelled from the party and swiftly distanced himself from the Mandir agenda. In a rerun of the Vaghela episode, the BJP proved unable to satisfy the aspirations of a strongly-rooted member of the upwardly mobile Mandal classes. But U.P. is not Gujarat. The party polls only one in three votes, not one in two as in the latter. The assembly elections due in October 2001 may be held sooner, should the ministry fall.

The impact in the short term may be contained within manageable limits. The Vajpayee government is in no danger due to the denouement in Lucknow. The National Democratic Alliance more than made up the shortfall of seats in Uttar Pradesh, mainly due to its deftly conceived network of alliances across most of the major states. But what it did do was to freeze the party's own representation in the Lok Sabha at 182, putting its allies in a stronger bargaining position. This also made it more, not less, reliant on partners who cannot on any account permit the revival of the Mandir-based plank in an explicit form. For now, the hunger for power will muffle the voices calling for action on this front.

**T**he wider questions raised by *la affaire* Kalyan Singh will not go away so easily. Ever since its inception in the mid-1920s, the Rashtriya Swayam-sevak Sangh has had to grapple with the issue of caste. Even as its rhetoric focused on the dangers of confessional faiths, its *modus operandi* centrally rested on under-playing the tension between Brahmins and the cultivating castes and Depressed Classes in western India.

Much of the energy of the Jana Sangh as well as its present *avataar*,

the BJP, has gone into containing caste-related tensions. This has been done through a combination of social welfare or upliftment schemes with selective induction of key personnel into major posts in the party structure and in governments, though not as yet in the highest apex bodies of the Sangh itself. Both policies have been pursued in tandem in a state like U.P., with Nanaji Deshmukh taking the 'social work' route in Gonda in the eastern half of the state. At its most extreme end, general secretary K.N. Govindacharya articulated the need to change the '*chaal*, *charitra* and *chehra*' of the organisation in the aftermath of the debacle in the 1993 assembly polls.

**T**he efforts to transform in an orderly way the style of functioning, the character and the public face of the party have not been smooth. The *sarsangh-chalak* or supreme head of the RSS, Rajendra Singh, even went so far as to label social engineering as 'an alien, a Leninist concept'. There is here an inherent danger: moving too fast alienates the *status quo* groups, especially the upper castes. But with half a century as voters under a Republican Constitution behind them, the OBC communities may find the progress under the aegis of a pan-Hindu front far too halting and slow to satisfy their aspirations. Ditto for the Dalits

These conflicts have been most apparent in northern India for a variety of reasons, some structural and others specific to changes in recent times. Unlike in the South and West, it was difficult to polarise society on Brahmin versus non-Brahmin lines. The valley of the Ganga is not only home to one in four Brahmins in India, but along with other twice-born castes they constitute over a fifth of the total population. This is roughly equal to the proportion of Dalits in the electo-

rate. Further, it was only in the late '60s that an alternative political leadership emerged under Charan Singh to challenge the hegemony of the dominant social groups. Though the attempt failed, he opened up the space which was later exploited by Mulayam Singh Yadav.

**B**ut creating a bloc of disparate groups in the heartland is a difficult task for just about anyone. The saffron alliance's greatest gains came at the same time when the old Congress-led social alliance crumbled. Its problem is that relationships are now more tenuous and loyalties more fluid than in the past. Mandal as a symbol undoubtedly created the opportunity for an alliance on principle in favour of reservations among the two great political communities of the SCs and the OBCs. Though the alliance was short-lived, it has left a legacy that makes the establishment of the hegemony of Hindutva forces very difficult, even in the one macro-region where it has a logical constituency.

The very logic of democracy undercuts attempts to forge a pan-Hindu consciousness, even as it does not provide any guarantee as to who will fill the vacuum. Ideology has been critical in a bid to overcome constraints in the way of the saffron forces. From the moment of its birth as a political entity in 1980, the BJP has alternated between two broad strategies of inclusiveness and explicitly exclusivist politics. From 1980 to 1986 and again since 1996, it has placed more emphasis on forging a broad anti-Congress front and less on advancing its ideology by carving out a distinctive voter base. For a decade from 1986 onwards, Hindutva was foregrounded in all party campaigns as distinct from those of other front organisations of the Sangh. The two tracks are not mutually exclusive but

the compulsions of politics require that one and not the other be given more prominence at any specific moment in time.

Where does caste fit into this equation? There is no doubt that caste-based hierarchies constitute as intractable a problem for the votaries of political Hindutva as they once did for Congress nationalists. For the party, problems have been more intense in states like U.P. where the share of the national cake is small and the competition for service jobs sharper. To add to this, the temple issue seemed in the late '80s and early '90s to grip the popular imagination of large sections cutting across the ranks and divisions of Hindus in much of north India.

**T**hough never all-encompassing, it appeared to have the potential of creating a new grammar of politics. Leaders once boasted that no one dared oppose the building of the temple. The Congress was even named as an ally by Mahant Avaidyanath on the occasion of the *shilanyas* at Ayodhya in November 1989. The Janata Dal at the time treated secularism as a non-issue as it forged a pre-poll accord with Advani's party.

A decade later, the situation appears to have reversed itself. Mandal and its grammar of politics reigns uncontested over the political classes. Its opponents have melted away or confined themselves to hoping that market-led growth will render the state sector irrelevant over time. Caste has triumphed, at least for now, over the bid to forge in north India a freshly minted and militant Indian ethos centred on the temple at Ayodhya.

But a series of battles lie ahead. Its alliance with regional forces gives Atal Bihari Vajpayee more than a hold on power in New Delhi. It also opens up the possibility of expanding the base of his outfit among the OBCs who

are so central to Indian politics today. The very size of the country enables divergent policies to be pursued in different regions, even in neighbouring states. Upper caste power may have been reinvigorated in Lucknow but the bid for power in Bihar rests on an alliance with sections of the Dalits and the Mandal communities. Such attempts could even succeed for a time.

**T**he issue is whether the wider project can move ahead at the pace it once had. This seems highly unlikely if not impossible. Far from ideology overcoming caste-based loyalties, it appears not to be an effective solvent. The sheer bitterness with which Kalyan Singh speaks of how the saffron platform has no place for the marginal communities of yesteryear, indicates that cosmetic changes in the old order will not work. What, if anything, will? The deeper problem is that in what was its stronghold for much of the decade of the '90s, the building of a unified Hindu vote bank has been seriously damaged if not fundamentally compromised.

No wonder there were signs of panic in the Bihar unit of the BJP that the importance of the Forward Backward divide in the state may re-emerge and work to their detriment. Kalyan Singh may have gone his way; how his former colleagues dig their way out of this hole is what matters. At the moment the only way they can hold onto power is by underplaying their own distinctive beliefs and ideals. The public platform is thus open to those who espouse very different views of society. The social alliance that kept the party a front runner in the Ganga valley is coming undone. It is a time of great opportunity for its rivals. And what they do and how they fare will inevitably create ripples across the entire body politic.



# Poverty in the conversions debate

DILIP D'SOUZA

IT took a few days in cyclone-ravaged Erasama block in Orissa to bring the issue of conversions into sharp focus for me. Let me explain, beginning with a description of the situation there.

Erasama, in Jagatsinghpur district, was possibly the worst-hit part of the state. It shot into the national spotlight about a week after a second, and far more powerful, cyclone struck Orissa in October. By then, the waters that had flooded Erasama had begun to recede and thousands of bodies were discovered all over the block. As they were found, official estimates of the number killed by the cyclone tripled overnight, to 10,000 and more.

I went to Erasama about a week later. The scale of the devastation was something I was totally unprepared for. Enormous trees were uprooted everywhere. Telephone and electric poles lay twisted. For mile after mile, standing paddy crops – only days from harvest – were rotting away. The fields themselves, inundated by the tidal wave that roared through the block, were saline and filled with stagnant water. Huts and more robust structures had been simply flattened. And even after several days of cleaning up, bodies – both human and animal – were easily sighted everywhere.

It was overwhelmingly depressing. But at least relief work was going on throughout Erasama block. Saroj Jha, the additional special relief commissioner stationed there, was coordinating it all. He had streamlined an unending flow of volunteers, CRPF personnel, army regiments, doctors and various experts into a surprisingly efficient operation. Relief teams took supplies to affected villages. Doctors had set up clinics in remote villages, working day and night to treat everything from broken bones to severe diarrhoea. Volunteers were tramping to wells in the area, testing them for contamination, checking the incidence of diarrhoea, getting ready for a massive decontamination operation.

And there was possibly the worst job to be done: disposing of dead bodies, human or bovine. Teams had to gather enough scarce firewood in a pile, shovel the rotting body onto it, pour kerosene over everything, light a match. If there was not enough dry wood, or if the body was in the middle of a putrefying paddy field, it had to be buried. That meant an exhausting spell of digging and shovelling muck. It was nauseating, back breaking, tragic work under a fierce sun.

Yet in Erasama I met volunteers doing it enthusiastically, without regard to personal convenience or professed faith, with commitment, compassion, and a truly moving camaraderie and goodwill. There were TELCO employees, a pair of nuns in their grey habits, RSS and Ananda Marg volunteers, theology students, an Islamic youth group, CRPF constables, a team from Rourkela, army jawans, Youth Congress men, and frail women in white saris from the International Movement for the Prevention of Indecency.

The effort to cope with this vast tragedy – at least in Erasama – was humbling and inspiring. What brought these people here to give so freely of their time and energy? What made them throw themselves into exhausting physical effort? What made a young IAS officer belie every stereotyped image we have of bureaucrats who wallow in inefficiency, corruption and red tape?

It was while tossing these questions around in my mind that I found myself also thinking about the subject I want to address in this article, the issue that the cyclone had pushed off the front pages in early November. Perhaps it seems far-fetched to connect a cyclone to conversions. But in some ways, that was precisely the point: the very distance of conversions from what really matters in India.

Two aspects of the calamity in Orissa, in particular, got me wondering about conversions, about how this came to be a national issue all of a sudden. One: Thousands of huts were just blown away by the cyclone, sending their inhabitants to certain deaths. In Orissa's coastal areas – as in much of the rest of the country – people live in such huts because more solid structures are beyond their economic reach. (Actually, people in Orissa's coastal

districts were far wealthier than in the interior, but they still could not afford *pucca* homes). So the high death toll in this cyclone, like a lot of things in India, had much to do with the poverty that is possibly our greatest shame, our most urgent problem. With every day that passes, it grows more urgent.

Conscious of so many shattered lives in Erasama, conscious that the damage would have been significantly less had Orissa been less poverty ridden, the dust-up over conversions seemed almost obscene to me. What do they have to do with the way hundreds of millions of Indians live?

Two: I mentioned that the relief effort in Erasama was inspiring to see. As I watched selfless volunteers and jawans at work, it struck me that this must be what's meant by that much-abused term, 'nation-building': these people doing work that needs to be done. Not getting sidetracked by conversions or old mosques or apologies to be extracted, but just getting on with the job. It was hard to avoid thinking that had we had 50 years of such dedicated, focused assaults on India's problems, we would today be a powerful, respected country. Instead, our interminable wrangling over ancient trivialities means we are seen as a somewhat irrelevant nation, uninterested in addressing the issues that truly blight Indian lives. This, then, was the angle on conversions that devastation in Erasama put in my mind: their profound irrelevance to the way most Indians live, to the tasks we face as a nation.

And yet, while I take such irrelevance as a truism, I also know that it is not enough to dismiss conversions on that basis alone. There are those, not politicians either, to whom conversions are deeply relevant, deeply disturbing. It is to them that I want to address the rest of this article. I can-

not pretend to understand the insecurities that make conversions seem so threatening. But perhaps we will all benefit by putting them in some perspective.

To begin with, how many conversions are happening anyway? I really don't know. But it takes no more than a look at Indian census figures to realize that however many they are, they are not having much of an effect on the fraction of India's population that Christians represent. In 1971, India had 14.2 million Christians (2.6 per cent of the population); in 1981, 16.2 million (2.4 per cent); in 1991, 19.6 million (2.3 per cent). The simple story these figures tell: the Christian share of India's population is steadily decreasing. Natural reproduction plus conversions together have not been able to stall that.

What purpose does it serve, then, to turn that on its head and claim that the Christian fraction is actually increasing? For this is a bogey that many have become adept at stringing up. In late October, it was the turn of the Shankaracharya of Puri's Govardhan Math, Swami Nischalananda Saraswati. He was widely quoted expressing worry about the impending visit of the Pope to India. Why? Because his visit, the Swami said, 'would be a victory of the forces aiming to convert India into a Christian nation by the end of 2000 AD.'

Give this some thought. Let's assume that by 'Christian nation', the Shankaracharya means half of India – not the whole country, just half – will be Christian by the end of 2000. To accomplish that, the mysterious 'forces' he mentioned will need not just an about turn in the Christian population growth trend. They will need a ludicrous fantasy to come true. I will spare you the calculations here, but this is how ludicrous: there would

have to be 13 conversions every single second until 31 December 2000. Now all of India produces about one baby a second today. The Swami's bogey gallops along at 13 times that speed.

However many conversions are happening in India, they are clearly not happening at that rate. It is senseless to pretend they are. Yet, a major religious figure does exactly that. Why? Does his unfounded paranoia get us any closer to resolving this whole argument?

**I**t is easy to dismiss statements like the Shankaracharya's as just rhetoric. But the truth is that such rhetoric is used in various insidious ways, taken very seriously indeed. For example, in Anand Patwardhan's stark film 'Father, Son and Holy War', the Shiv Sena leader and once-Maharashtra chief minister, Manohar Joshi, is seen speaking at an election rally. He exhorts the Hindu women in the audience to bear eight children each—eight children!—to combat the spectre of a rising flood of Muslims. In an already densely populated country, what must we think when a to-be chief minister, a man who is now a Union minister for heavy industry, makes an irresponsible appeal like this?

Of course, when challenged, the argument about Christian population growth swiftly mutates. It is not the overall population we're talking about, proponents will say, but only that in certain areas. Like the North East. Nagaland and Mizoram are nearly fully Christian, they will say, and look what's happened there: separatism has taken root. The implication, and this is the impression the proponents truly want held widely, is that Christianity breeds separatism. Thus all Christians in India can be assumed to be silent fifth-columnists. Vishwa Hindu Parishad leaders like Ashok

Singhal have been diligently spreading this tale for public consumption. Christians and Muslims, Singhal has often pronounced, have 'extra-territorial loyalties.'

Now this goes well beyond rhetoric. Section 153B of the Indian Penal Code says: 'Whoever by words either spoken or written makes any imputation that any class of people cannot, by reason of their being members of any religious group, bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of India ... shall be punished with imprisonment to three years or fine or both.' Could there be a clearer violation of Section 153B than Singhal's claims that Christians and Muslims have 'extra-territorial loyalties'? I don't need to add that Singhal has not had Section 153B applied to him.

Violating the law is one thing. The ancient tactic of identifying targets to heap calumny on, to turn the faithful against, is quite another. If all Indian Christians and Muslims can suddenly be labelled traitors, Hindus can be united, if by nothing else, by getting them to suspect the loyalties of followers of these other faiths. And such unity, if it can be achieved, spells powerful political potential.

**Y**et the tactic begs so many questions. What happened in Telengana in the '60s: was that Christian separatism? What about Tamil aspirations to self-rule, the whole Dravida movement? Were the Christians who fought alongside their fellow Goans for independence from Portugal closet separatists? And consider a different set of questions. If Christianity tends to damage the country, what of the crimes people like Narasimha Rao, Rajiv Gandhi, H.K.L. Bhagat, Sukh Ram and Jayalalitha are accused of? What about L.K. Advani and his *rath yatra*; Bal Thackeray and his stoking of riots in Bombay?

These men and women have arguably caused more damage, destruction and death to India and Indians than decades of separatism in Nagaland and Mizoram have managed. My point is not to wave off the troubles in the North East. It is instead to ask: Is India served by ignoring the complex web of problems that drive people to desperate methods as in the North East, focusing instead only on their faith? Is India served by pointing fingers solely at a tiny minority? Is it served by allowing demagogues and criminals to escape scrutiny because they are not Christian?

**B**ut then there are those who are outraged that Christian missionaries work only in what they like to call 'poor, illiterate and innocent tribal areas.' You don't see them in Bombay's posh Malabar Hill, or in 'the Brahmin-dominated ward of Mylapore in Chennai.' (Quotes from an article in The Times of India by M.V. Kamath, 13 October 1999). Why ever not? I would like to answer that by quoting a letter to Outlook magazine (25 October 1999) by Ravi Pratap, who calls himself 'a native of a tribal-dominated district.' According to him, 'Christian missionaries are providing better education, better healthcare and even employment to the most backward.' Better, that is, than they have ever got from 'the government and their existing religious leaders.' This is why some of these 'poor, uneducated tribals' choose Christianity. Besides, and quite naturally, missionaries go where the need is greatest. Poor and illiterate tribal areas are, I suspect, in greater need of healthcare, employment and education than Malabar Hill and Mylapore.

Of course, the outrage over the activities of missionaries in these areas is wider still in scope. For missionaries are accused of converting poor

tribals by offering them 'bribes' and 'inducements'. What might such bribes be? In a report in *The Sunday Observer* a year ago (20 December 1998), Sunil Poolani wrote of a tribal in Gujarat who was offered 'a white powder' by nuns from the Church of North India. They told him it was 'God's prasad' and could 'cure any illness'. That, and some catechism classes, convinced the man to convert.

This miraculous prasad, Poolani later learned, was nothing more divine than powdered Crocin. The motive of the CNI nuns was clearly nothing more divine than more numbers added to the fold. No wonder Poolani reported that this tribal's brother is now 'seriously thinking' of reconvertng: a Hindu group told him that 'they would give us more benefits than what the church does.' After all, it takes very little to promise 'more benefits' than powdered Crocin.

**T**his is how mindless and cynical the whole conversion and reversion business can be. But this entire episode raises a dismaying question. If there are Indians so miserably poor and illiterate that handing them a powder is enough to persuade them to profess Christianity, and some other trinket suffices to make them recant, what is the greater crime? The conversions or their poverty?

Or is it the education and healthcare that constitute 'inducements'? And if they do, if in a half-century-old India there are those who consider such basics 'inducements', it seems to me that we have some serious problems indeed.

An aside I cannot resist: this reminds me once again of the Shiv Sena's redoubtable Manohar Joshi. As chief minister of Maharashtra, he appeared in May 1997 before the Srikrishna Commission inquiring into the 1992-93 Bombay riots. According to him, the fundamental reason for the

riots was that the Congress had spent the years since Independence 'appeasing' Muslims. And what examples of such 'appeasement' did Joshi offer the Commission? 'The lack of any effort on the part of the government to educate [Muslims] and ensuring that they remained impoverished.'

When denying Muslims education and keeping them poor is 'appeasement', I suppose powdered Crocin must constitute a 'bribe' for poor tribals; education, healthcare and employment must qualify as 'inducements'. Discussing poverty in the context of conversions, I find I am back to where I began this article. In Erasama as in 'poor, illiterate and innocent tribal areas', in city slums as in villages across this country, poverty is reality for hundreds of millions of Indians. It is the single greatest cause of suffering among Hindus, as also among every other kind of Indian. Yet those who raise the alarm about conversions, arguing that they are a threat to Hinduism, seem entirely nonchalant about the immense danger poverty poses to Hindu lives. To Indian lives.

Isn't it time we turned our full attention to this danger? Isn't it time we focused, as the Erasama volunteers were doing, on the urgent priorities we face as a country?

**W**hen I wrote a considerably shorter article in this vein in *The Times of India* recently, an article in response referred to my 'spirited defence of conversions'. It startled me, because nothing could be further from the truth. I couldn't really care less about conversions, would be happy if there were none, even happier if everybody gave up religion altogether.

No, whether in the *Times*, here, or elsewhere, I am hardly defending conversions. I am suggesting there are far more important things we must worry about.

# A sucker's payoff

BHARAT KARNAD

INDIA'S nuclear policy before the May 1998 Tests of 'No bomb, no export, no blackmail' fetched the country, according to some, a 'sucker's payoff' – no rewards, just penalties. This is an outcome that may again obtain as a result of the deal presently under consideration.

The earlier impression of the 'security dialogue' as going nowhere is giving way to a view of a fatal Indian compromise in the offing, which was strengthened by Minister for External Affairs Jaswant Singh's lengthy interview to *The Hindu* (29 November 1999). In it, he made the case for India's signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) soon, notwithstanding its rejection by the US Senate and its non-ratification by the other major nuclear weapons states, Russia and China.

The haste in signing this wretched treaty is foolhardy in the extreme. Three beneficial things will, however, happen were the Government of India (GOI) to not sign this treaty. It will buy the country time and

the legal space to test further, should that become necessary, in order to realise a more survivable deterrent with greater lethality, continue leveling the strategic playing field, and afford New Delhi the leverage derived from the promise of eventual adherence to the treaty to more substantively establish India's geopolitical role and global interests in the coming century.

These are enormous advantages not to be frittered or gifted away in return for something as evanescent as Washington's goodwill and offers of loosened controls on credit and technology flows which, as will be argued here, will follow provided the GOI keeps unwaveringly to its economic reforms script. It would be gratuitous to expend India's substantial bargaining power on something that is in the US' trade and commercial interest to affect and which no administration in Washington will be able to resist doing anyway.

The CTBT is positively harmful to Indian national security interests for

a whole host of reasons, a few of which will be elucidated in this article. Owing to India's signing the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT) prohibiting atmospheric tests, underground testing is the only medium left to India for validating existing and future advanced weapons designs. But configuring a nuclear weapon is, in a sense, a binary process: the explosion physics has to be just right and tests are needed to prove that the assumptions inherent in a particular weapon design are correct.

Thus, for example, another test is an absolute imperative to test a reworked thermonuclear weapon design. The one tested in May 1998, many scientists even here believe, fizzled out. The doubt is about whether or not the shock wave set off the 'secondary' (meaning, the store of thermonuclear fuel). Reading into the test data, the dissenting scientists who, incidentally, are in a majority, are convinced that most of the yield was due to the boosted fission trigger (or the 'primary') and that there was virtually no thermonuclear burn.

In other words, based on a new set of assumptions this design of the hydrogen bomb at least will have to be modified and tested again. Another series of fullscale thermonuclear tests is hence essential if the country and especially the armed forces have to be reassured that the thermonuclear weapons in the inventory will actually perform as they are supposed to.

Along with the certification of the explosion physics, nuclear tests also provide evidence of the various components constituting a thermonuclear or hydrogen bomb as having worked or not. According to Richard Garwin, an eminent American weapons designer, there are over 4,000 components, each of which has to work just so for the H-weapon assem-

bly, for instance, to explode. Garwin's figure is an exaggeration, but the underlying premise that the array of components in each type of weapon has to be seen to work, is sound. Only this can inspire confidence in the end-user.

**G**iven the indifferent track record of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DR&DO) in the conventional military field, its involvement in weaponising the nuclear devices has raised doubts in the military's mind about the performance of these weapons. It is only natural that the armed services would want to be absolutely sure that the nuclear weapons they employ will deliver. To reassure them on this score was one of the principal motivations for the '98 tests. Unfortunately, not all the designs tested did, in fact, work.

The basic problem of DR&DO's credibility was compounded in the wake of the N-tests with the GOI's announcement of a moratorium on testing and its policy of relying henceforth on computer simulation to design and verify the performance of newer nuclear weapons designs. The very mention of computer simulated test results puts the military on its guard because it feels that DR&DO has for the last thirty odd years been selling it promises not actual performance. And that it puts no great store by weapons produced purely on the basis of computer simulation.

The distinction between explosion physics and testing a weapons assembly is crucial to understanding the grave doubts many have, including past leaders of the nuclear establishment, like P.K. Iyengar, former chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, who has spoken out against the tall claims about the '98 tests and even more about the government's seeming inclination to sign the CTBT.

If the best and the brightest in the country's nuclear and defence establishments, many of whom share Iyengar's apprehensions, have not gone public, it is out of fear of being sidelined.

That the limitations of computer simulation, even with sophisticated software, to certify extant weapons and new design configurations are severe and can in no way replace testing, is known to our weaponeers. But studying physical performance data and thereupon engineering the appropriate modifications into the weapons assemblies and explosion physics premises is only possible with repeated testing. This is why the US conducted over 1,000 odd tests in the Nevada desert. And why the Indian government's position that a handful of tests is sufficient to construct a reliable and credible deterrent is met with disbelief in professional circles.

**M**ore specifically, the weakness in the official line is evident from the information in the public realm: The 1974 'implosion' involved a big cumbersome device weighing a couple of tons. Of the five tests triggered on the 11th and 13th of May 1998, only one, by the way, involved a deployable nuclear weapon. The other four did not test full weapons assemblies. There is still considerable disquiet in the science and technology community about the cancellation of the sixth test, which fact has been ballyhooed by the government as a show of Indian restraint. Who advised this course of action and why are still matters of some speculation. Had this extra test got underway, according to a senior Defence Ministry official who spoke at a recent seminar held under 'Chatham House rules' (meaning, no attribution), India would have had additional weapons design options.

A scientific source at this same seminar stated somewhat optimistically that, after various permutations and combinations of known and tested variables and design particularities, the country has a dozen proven weapons configurations to choose from in structuring a nuclear deterrent. Even assuming all these designs, other than the one tested, work as advertised – and that is a big ‘if’ for the reasons alluded to above – the question is: Is that enough? And, bear in mind that the most decisive potential weapon, namely, the thermonuclear or fusion device, may have failed in the one-off test.

**T**he still greater danger is elsewhere. Physical testing is the surest method of finding out which weapon design works, and which does not and why. Subcritical tests, which R. Chidambaram, the current chairman AEC, is convinced is within this country’s competence, are by any reckoning a poor substitute. Not the least because sustained subcritical testing requires very expensive high technology facilities. An outlay of six billion dollars has been set aside by Washington to build its National Ignition Facility, where extremely high powered lasers able to recreate temperatures for thermonuclear burn, will help in perfecting newer genus of fusion armaments. But the design parameters will, however, be derived from the extensive test database the Americans have collected over almost fifty years.

Now consider the Indian situation. Just one of the five Indian May ’98 tests pertained to a thermonuclear device and that too is now suspect. Nevertheless, the information on innumerable performance variables available from just this one doubtful explosive test is deemed adequate by way of a database for subcritical testing to facilitate production of newer,

more advanced, thermonuclear weaponry! This level of self-confidence verging on scientific and technological hubris could be ignored were it not that it directly endangers the nuclear deterrent and national security in the long run by increasing the chances that any new and advanced weapons designs that might eventuate from Indian subcriticals in the future will, in the absence of actual tests, run the risk of failing. And, in the larger context, that India may end up having an inventory full of supposedly ‘decisive’ nuclear weapons that do not work. Proof of performance of the weapons systems in the deterrent force will then be available only in time of war. By when it will be too late to matter one way or the other.

**T**his is an alarming prospect: the country, after having invested a whole lot of scarce resources, finds only a chancy deterrent to defend it, absent the mandated regime of tests for new weapons. Indate nuclear arms are as central to keeping the nuclear deterrent credible as modern conventional military forces are to deter conventional threats. It is this natural process of technology and performance upgradation that will be imperilled by signing the CTBT.

Pakistan, for instance, has no such problems. Its forte has been engineering competence. China has given it detailed weapons designs and will continue to do so in the future. All that A.Q. Khan and his cohorts do is machine the plutonium core of the bomb and otherwise cobble together the weapon, component by component, Meccano-like. Because the Chinese have done all the testing and have built up a large database, the designs that have accrued as a result and passed on to the Pakistanis will be certified ones. So, Pakistan does not really need to test at all. Lacking the

nuclear weapons supplier relationship with any country of the kind Islamabad has cultivated with Beijing over the years, India will be unable to bank upon an arsenal of proven and tested nuclear weapons. What to talk of the five nuclear weapons states (P-5 – US, Russia, China, UK and France), the Indian nuclear forces may not even match the reliability of its Pakistani counterpart.

The US Government has made no bones about the fact that tests are meant to ‘lock in’ countries like India, ‘in a technological *status quo*’ highly favourable to the P-5. As Secretary of State Madeleine Albright wrote in a recent column in *Time* magazine: ‘We do not need more tests to protect our security. Would-be proliferators or modernizers, however, must test if they are to develop the kind of advanced, compact nuclear weapons that are most threatening.’

**I**n this context, the American motivation for accepting India’s claims of having reached an acceptable stage of subcritical testing – insofar as it persuades New Delhi to sign CTBT, is clear enough. But what is the excuse for Indians pushing for this country’s signature? It turns out that they are seeking American ‘goodwill’ which, Ambassador Thomas Graham, Jr. who has led the US team in various arms control negotiations candidly told a Delhi audience a few months before the 1998 tests, is all India can expect by way of returns for signing this treaty!

Indeed, never has the collaborationist intent to realise American policy objectives been made clearer. Consider the writings of the group, including a number of leading columnists and retired foreign secretaries, which is giving the lead in drumming up ‘domestic consensus’ on this issue. This fictive consensus is

expected to enable the government expeditiously to put its John Hancock on the treaty. C. Raja Mohan, one of this tribe, rails against the opposition parties for their stance against the CTBT (*The Hindu*, 9 December 1999); on the one hand lambasting the Left for rejecting 'the one instrument which would restrain India from further developing its nuclear weapons' and otherwise limit its Indian nuclear programme' and, on the other hand, chiding the Congress party for departing from the Nehruvian legacy.

It is another matter that such analysts have not given much thought to the technical aspects of tests. But even their historical narrative is faulty, especially in recalling Nehru's alleged enthusiasm for such accords. Jawaharlal professed the desire for disarmament, yes, but less so for arms control agreements like CTBT, which in effect legitimize nuclear weapons. His support for the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT) prohibiting atmospheric tests and so on, has to be juxtaposed against his strong nurturing of the country's nuclear weapons programme, something brought out in a recent book – *India's Nuclear Bomb* – an authoritative account of the Indian nuclear bomb programme by George Perkovich, a strong American anti-proliferationist. This last puts an entirely different spin on events, buttressing what I have been saying for several years now based on my own research findings, that the first Indian prime minister cleverly used the disarmament issue in the fifties as an instrument of *moralpolitik* to blunt the latent threat posed by nuclear weapons to countries like India lacking similar protection.

But it is not so much the pro-CTBT wallahs' self-serving reading of history and their foolish attempts at demonising certain sections of society

(in this case, the 'extreme Right'), which is worrisome. Rather, it is their confusing the tactical, short term, gains for the country for its enduring national interests, a tendency severely deleterious of national security.

Let us for the nonce leave out considering the option of rejecting CTBT outright and instead address the issue of immediately signing the treaty. A list of pluses and minuses if dispassionately put together will reveal almost no pluses.

The argument is that India should sign the treaty but not ratify it just yet; that this limited action will fetch the country disproportionate returns – the immediate lifting of G-8 economic sanctions and a freer flow of western technology. Considering India's present economic conditions and confronted by, what an economic adviser to the government has called the 'fiscal deterrent', a resources-wise strapped government, it is said, has few alternatives other than to rely on incoming international capital and technology to spur the country's economic and industrial growth.

MEA is of the view that, while the ability of President Clinton to deliver on his commitments is no doubt declining, an early Indian signature on the treaty will help him loosen the US Government's controls on credit (from the World Bank and IMF) and on technology transfers. That delaying signing the CTBT will mean that the ostensibly unhelpful status quo will persist until a new administration takes office in January 2001 and settles down and that the coming three years or so are too many to lose by way of lack of access to much needed American funds, technology, and so on.

Framing the solution in this way points to weaknesses in apprehending the situation and is contra-factual. For one, India has not only withstood the

effects of economic sanctions, but has succeeded in driving a wedge between the US and its trans-Atlantic allies and between the US Government and American companies. With China fading as an investment destination, India's 'big emerging market' is the lure for western countries and corporations with a yen for profit. The incentive to American companies was put this way by Congressman Sam Gejdensen, Member of the House International Relations Committee: 'India is the fifth largest economy in the world, and the country is expected to have 500 million middle class consumers within the next eight years. The demand for consumer and industrial products and services has been expanding rapidly and the removal of some of the trade barriers has given new momentum to this growth.'

India's democratically functioning government, the rule of law and the English language as official *lingua franca* are other virtues which get translated into business opportunities. No First World country wishes to lag behind in the race for a share of the Indian market. The classic rivalry this has engendered is reflected in the clash between the American Boeing Company and the French Airbus Industrie to sell long and medium range passenger aircraft to Air India and Indian Airlines – a market for some three billion dollars worth of aircraft. Boeing, assisted by high-flying firms like General Electric, is lobbying extremely hard with the US Government to go easy on India. These companies fear that continued American official politico-economic pressure on New Delhi will convert directly into lost business for them, and that the gainers will be European and Far Eastern companies.

The Boeing-Airbus head butting to India's benefit can be endlessly



replicated in every other sphere. What is required is for the government to concentrate on liberalising the economy at a faster pace and, as a long term policy, to integrate the hard currency spending plans of all ministries, and when it comes to making capital purchases or awarding infrastructure contracts, for instance, to pit American, European and Far Eastern multinational companies against each other before carefully choosing the company for maximum political effect. The losing firms should be advised of future tendering opportunities and warned that their chances are bleak if their governments continue to abide by restrictive policies and regimes. What is recommended is the *jijutsu* principle: use the strength of the adversary to work for you. This is the method China has adopted with much to show for it.

So whether or not India signs CTBT, the regime of sanctions will be progressively diluted and in time become irrelevant simply because surplus or investible international capital has to find productive employment somewhere. And it will find it in India, if only the milieu is made conducive for such investment. The Indian government will then need to do nothing more than stand aside and watch an opened up Indian economy lay waste any US or other G-8-inspired regime of economic and technology sanctions, even as foreign exchange reserves increase and the balance of trade rights itself.

In regard to technology, it is not certain what has been promised. It is obvious though that Washington has not approved of India's membership in the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) or the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) – which would have allowed less hindered access to sensitive 'dual use' technologies – as quid

pro quo for Delhi's signing CTBT – a bargain the MEA has reportedly mooted. In the event, what kind of advanced technology can India look forward to obtaining from the US? New fangled techniques to fry potato chips? Is the technology available to India, as a result of signing the CTBT, going to be of markedly higher levels than what is accessed by India right now? The evolving MEA stance is animated by a curious mix of complacency and over-confidence last seen in the period before the war with China in 1962. The trouble is the situation we find ourselves in today is far more onerous and alarming.

GOI would be well-advised against falling into the trap of the kind Russia walked into by precipitately dismantling the socialist state, on American advice, only to have the US remove the economic safety net of investment and other help in the economic transition period. The grand strategic Cold War aim was fulfilled: the USSR self-destructed. One can only hope India does not take a similar bait and compromise its sovereign prerogative and strategic independence by signing on the dotted line.

Then again, even if President Clinton moves to ease technology controls, the most he can do is propose changes in the extant system of laws; it is the American legislature which will dispose. The US Congress, controlled by the opposition Republican Party, is unlikely to approve any such initiative if for no other reason than cussedness as was evidenced in the case of the US policy of transfers of technology to China.

It is the same Republican Party majority in the US Senate which refused to ratify the CTBT, claiming it would grievously hurt the American nuclear deterrent. This development is pertinent to our own concerns about

the treaty. The Republicans are expected to retain their majority in the Senate and capture the White House as well. The two leading Republican Presidential hopefuls, Governor George W. Bush and Senator John McCain, have come out strongly against it. Any which way one ponders its prospects, the chances of its ratification in the foreseeable future, say the next eight to ten years, by the US is slim to non-existent and the treaty is, for all intents and purposes, dead. (Why 8-10 years? Add a year or so remaining in the Clinton era to two terms, or eight years, for either of the Republican Party frontrunners for the presidency.)

The 8-10 year time span in which a CTBT is most unlikely is significant when set alongside of what the senior scientist at the aforementioned seminar stated about the testing imperative. The '98 series of nuclear tests did not mean, he said, that no tests were needed any time in the future, but that no testing is required *only* in the 'next five to ten years.' (This scientist is among those central to the Shakti tests and has a vested interest in supporting what Doctors Chidambaram and Kalam have publicly maintained, that India did not need any more tests to install a deterrent. Even so he did not want to sully his professional reputation by hewing completely to this official line. As to why his learned seniors took this position in the first place may not bear scrutiny.)

In essence, what it means is that the nuclear deterrent capabilities India possesses today will be dated by the end of the first decade. Taken together with the other military implications of signing the CTBT detailed earlier, namely, the possibility that India may end up having an arsenal stocked entirely with dud weapons, and the dangers become manifest.

But there is still another source of danger looming before this country. The US is determined to resurrect two major advanced technology programmes. One is the so-called Star Wars programme consisting of space and satellite-based weapons able to launch nuclear ordnance at targets on earth, and to kill other satellites in orbit and 'hostile' missiles in the boost phase. The other are the NMD (National Missile Defence) and TMD (Theatre Missile Defence) systems geared specifically to neutralise the threat ostensibly posed to the United States by long range Third World, including Indian, ballistic and cruise missiles.

The military cost of signing the CTBT is not only that it will prevent India from fielding effective nuclear weapons and stop it from updating them as required but increasingly render even the existing Indian deterrent vulnerable to space-based shoot-down systems or anti-missile missiles.

In trying to portray India's signature on CTBT as of little consequence, its champions here have erred on several other counts as well. First of all, by separating the signing, ratifying and depositing the treaty instruments stages of treaty acquiescence, they have made spurious distinctions, as former PM Inder Kumar Gujral has stated. In the Indian system of governance, constitutional experts attest, the prime minister is all that matters. Depending on his standing, he can railroad treaty acceptance through the cabinet, ratify and commit the country to any piece of paper without any Parliamentary sanction in one fell swoop.

All this guff about how time consuming and elaborate the process of cabinet approval for treaty ratification is, still does not obviate the fact that there is no institutional mechanism like in the US where a treaty has to be

ratified by two-thirds majority in the Senate for it to come into force. In any case, signature, even without ratification, obliges the signatory countries to conform to its terms and conditions. A powerful country like the US may be able to transgress treaty obligations, but once India signs CTBT it cedes the only strong bargaining chip it does possess.

There is an even more dangerous element – the Trojan Horse – within the provisions of CTBT dealing with verification inspections so intrusive as to impinge on national sovereignty. Any P-5 country, able to muster a majority in the verification council, can ask for and get an on-site inspection mandated under UN aegis of any facility or suspect installation in a signatory country. There is no protection against such deliberate harassment and policing measures. Go ask the Iraqis about the UN inspection teams searching for supposedly clandestine factories researching, developing and producing weapons of mass destruction!

Ambassador Arundhati Ghose, whose ringing phrase 'not now, not ever' represented the high point of the Indian resolve to resist western machinations in producing a hugely unbalanced draft CTBT in Geneva, has repeatedly warned that signing it would amount to letting the strictures of the 1968 Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty, which India has not signed, in through the back door and that this treaty is not a web India should care to get enmeshed in even if this treaty had no other negatives.

So, the end-game lines up like this: India, without a proven nuclear arsenal, signs CTBT and in so doing revives Clinton's foreign policy record and the extant iniquitous international order, even as it buries its longstanding demand that the major nuclear weapons states commit them-

selves to a time-bound framework for eliminating nuclear weapons. The result is the P-5 sit secure behind their strong nuclear barricades, India gets stiffed and disarmament recedes further into the background.

Considering what India stands to lose by 'merely' signing this treaty, the question that pro-CTBT-ers ask – 'What will India lose by signing the treaty now?' ought, in fact, to be turned on them: 'What, in God's name, will we gain by doing so?'

As perilous as the security ramifications of signing CTBT are for the country, the likely domestic political fallout is bound to be devastating for Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. His reputation as a proud and unbending nationalist will be mud. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, moreover, will find it impossible to refute the charge of a sellout that will inevitably be flung at it. More damaging still will be the accusation of assisting the Americans to gut the Indian nuclear deterrent, and all for a few dollars and some technology, the equivalent of Judas' 'pieces of silver'.

The prime minister, buffeted by coalitional pulls and pressures and, immanently, the OBC backwash from Kalyan Singh's ouster as Uttar Pradesh chief minister, is hardly in a position politically to withstand a far stronger wave of resentment mixed with disappointment and sense of betrayal that will follow his decision to kowtow to Washington and sign the CTBT. Many of Vajpayee's well-wishers anticipate that the day he signs this treaty will be the endpoint of an illustrious career which was at its apogee when he ordered the nuclear tests. Inevitably, the US will lose interest and a nuclear de-natured India will lose its leverage and fall back disgruntledly into the familiar mode, of begging, Oliver Twist-fashion, 'for more'.

# Since the Pokhran tests

ACHIN VANAIK

WHEN India carried out its nuclear tests in May 1998, those who condemned that action and the dynamic that it inaugurated did so for many reasons, but most importantly because for the first time the shadow of a nuclear holocaust had been spread over South Asia. With both India and Pakistan now becoming declared nuclear weapons states and the deep historical enmity between the two, a *new* danger – of nuclear exchange – had been *added* when it need not and should never have been introduced.

Barely a year later, those who dismissed such fears were shown to be comprehensively wrong. Seldom have so-called strategic-nuclear experts suffered so swift and obvious a come-uppance and embarrassment. The eruption of the conflict in Kargil, activated by an intrusion of both mujahideen and Pakistan Army regulars across the Line of Control and the scale of the Indian military response

(effectively treating it as something near a full-scale war), provoked a frenzy of bellicose nationalism on both sides. Among the worst aspects of this frenzy were the spate of threats and counter-threats about each country's willingness to use nuclear weapons if 'provoked' or by way of 'retaliation'. This was not the discourse of security but of nuclear insanity. Suddenly the spectre of a nuclear exchange in South Asia had become more real and direct than ever before.

Pokhran II and then Chagai opened a new and qualitatively more dangerous chapter in the ongoing story of India-Pakistan relations. Before then, the two issues which bedevilled mutual relations were the nuclear issue and the Kashmir question. But they could more obviously and easily have been treated as separate issues. Had India, before May 1998, ever been interested in responding to repeated official overtures from

Islamabad for denuclearisation of the region, then this could have qualitatively improved mutual relations and had a positive effect on the Kashmir issue as well. The train of events set in place by May 1998 have now linked the two issues of nuclearisation and Kashmir. Not in the sense that one cannot be resolved without resolving the other. On the contrary, the nuclear issue can still be resolved, i.e. denuclearisation, without the Kashmir issue necessarily being solved. Conversely, the Kashmir issue might be resolved but without denuclearisation taking place. Once nuclear weapons systems emerge then they often remain even when hostilities between rivals weakens or disappears, viz. the end of the Cold War and the Sino-Soviet conflict. But they are connected in the obvious and frightening sense that conventional military conflict over Kashmir and related issues now embodies a dynamic that can lead to nuclear exchange.

**O**utside pressure was stronger on India which had initiated the whole regional nuclearisation process. Herein lies the genesis of the Lahore prime ministerial summit meeting in March 1999. It served a useful purpose for both governments to deflect domestic and external criticism. In India the pro-nuclear elite *had* to hype up the summit in order to project this as some decisive political breakthrough made possible by the 'wondrous properties' of nuclearisation. In actual fact, not only did the summit mean politically much less than made out, the centrepiece of that summit – the so-called Lahore Declaration – legitimised the acquisition by both countries of nuclear weapons; it also legitimised further preparations for the development of a full-fledged nuclear weapons system. That is why supposedly confidence-building measures were

about informing each other beforehand of missile tests, not about restricting or banning such tests. But because of that summit and the fact that Kargil came as a military surprise to India, it reinforced the false sense of self-righteousness among the Indian elite that Pakistan had carried out some kind of a betrayal.

**T**here are three key lessons then to be learnt from Kargil. First, India-Pakistan relations have been set back by years. This is not just at the official level. The BJP government and the general character of elite Indian nationalism have ensured that Pakistan has been demonised and the 'threat' it represents to India exaggerated out of all proportion. This has greatly benefited the anti-Pakistan hawks in India and the proponents of an aggressive, anti-Muslim Hindu nationalism. Their poison has spread, especially among the urban elite more of whom now believe that Pakistan is something like a mortal threat to India and that it should collapse.

Demonising Pakistan for Kargil is dangerous not only for hardening hostilities on both sides and promoting similar counter-reactions in an escalating spiral of mutual distrust. It also feeds those views which dehumanise the other side and make it more possible to talk of 'nuking' the Other. It feeds the view that the other side is capable of using its weapons first regardless of what its public commitments may or may not be, and therefore strengthens the pressures to take 'necessary' counter-measures. In short, nuclear tensions and hostilities deepen, which then has its own knock-on effects on the general political relationship.

Kargil provoked the most incredible outbursts of nuclear insanity from both sides. In a neat parallel, the most powerful Hindu communal

organisation, the RSS, in its Hindi mouthpiece *Panchjanya*, declared that India had not produced nuclear weapons to keep on the shelf but should consider using them, and the Pakistan minister for religious affairs, Haq, effectively used the same language to describe what Pakistan should do with its newly tested nuclear weaponry. Some in Pakistan said it would have to use its nuclear might if India pushed it too far. In India, counter-threats to respond massively were declared not just to deter. It expressed a real fear that Pakistan might use its nuclear arsenal; the promise of retaliation was supposed to 'reassure' the Indian public. Reassurance of this kind is crazy because a second use is not an act of security but of senseless, indeed suicidal, revenge. It only stimulates further rounds of nuclear exchanges.

**H**ere the second lesson was obvious – nuclear weapons are most likely to be used in wartime or near wartime situations. It is in such situations that deterrence (always logically flawed) is most likely to break down. Indeed, on the Indian side, many stalwarts of the view that security be pursued through nuclear deterrence were reduced to acknowledging that Pakistan could well use nuclear weapons, that India should not assume that Pakistan would not use such weapons and that it should then retaliate. Some claimed that the U.S. (not mutual deterrence) would prevent Pakistan from using its weapons. India and Pakistan are today the only two countries which have remained locked into a posture of mutual strategic hostility for over 50 years, a situation which shows no signs of early dissipation. They are the countries most likely to engage in wars in the future and they are both nuclear equipped. In short, it is not external propaganda

but the simple and obvious truth that a nuclear exchange and war are more likely in South Asia than anywhere else in the world.

Third, the chances of a conventional military conflict escalating into a nuclear exchange become greater when both countries have in place openly deployed weapons systems. Pakistan as the nuclearly less well-endowed and developed rival would have to disperse and decentralise control of its weapons making unauthorised, hasty or accidental use of them more likely. Both countries would have to fear possible 'decapitation' strikes, promoting the recourse to launch-on-warning or even 'automatic' mechanisms of releasing launches thereby further heightening nuclear tensions. Kargil then has given its warning. Things will become worse in the future unless we get off the regional nuclear escalator.

The Draft Nuclear Doctrine (DND) is a statement of intent on India's part to embark on precisely such an escalator. It is so open-ended and ambitious (triadic deployment, tactical weapons, developing a second-strike capacity to counter the U.S., a 'ballistic missile defence system' – nothing, in principle, is excluded) as to make a mockery of all claims that India is pursuing a 'minimum deterrent', that there will be no competitive arms race (with Pakistan and then China), that the system will be cheap and safe (the DND's insistence on 'prompt retaliation' means high alert).

Events over the last year have confirmed that the two most striking consequences of India going nuclear, at least in regard to the state of Indo-U.S. relations, is the extent to which the U.S. has become a key interlocutor for New Delhi and therefore the shrinkage in space for the pursuit of an Indian foreign policy sufficiently

independent of U.S. concerns. After initial Indian attempts to get the world, especially the nuclear weapons states (NWSs), to formally acknowledge its new status as a nuclear weapons power failed, New Delhi had to adopt a new tack. It would now settle for *de facto* recognition as a nuclear power with informal entry into the nuclear club for which it was willing to buy western, especially U.S., acceptance.

Since the tests, the Indian government, therefore, sought consciously to woo the U.S. On the economic front, the BJP-led government accelerated the adoption of neo-liberal policies of privatisation, opening up sectors hitherto carefully protected from foreign capital and in other ways seeking to send the message that U.S. objections to Indian nuclearisation should be subordinated to the pursuit of economic compatibility between India and the West and the pursuit of profitability by western and U.S. corporate interests. From WTO discussions to those of the MAI (multilateral agreement on investment), a new pro-U.S. flexibility on India's part was evident. The economic sanctions imposed by the U.S. on India were a problem, but the fact that such sanctions were subsequently significantly eased (though not fully eliminated) indicated that Indian efforts to soften the U.S. response to its nuclearisation were not without some success.

When the U.S., in the name of combatting terrorism, carried out its own illegal, indeed terrorist bombing attacks on Sudan and on camps in Afghanistan, the official Indian government response was extraordinary. It not only failed to condemn the attacks but took the occasion to point out to the U.S. that it should now understand Indian fears concerning 'terrorism' emanating from Pakistan and there-

fore better appreciate Indian compulsions and temptations to carry out similar cross-border pre-emptive or 'retaliatory' air raids. More recently, when the U.S. and NATO carried out their air attacks on Serbia, the Indian government's response had stiffened and it did come out with a mildly and cautiously worded criticism of the U.S. action. Now, ignoring the fact that state terrorism (especially by the U.S.) is the worst of all culprits, India is seeking to cooperate with Washington in its efforts to use the bugbear of combatting group terrorism, particularly in the Middle East, to pursue its wider foreign policy ends.

On the specifically nuclear level, what was most evident about Indian efforts over the last year was its desire to convince the U.S. that it was a 'responsible', indeed 'potentially useful' nuclear power. It is amazing but true that the *first* explanation for why India carried out its tests was given not to the Indian public but in a letter to the U.S. President, Bill Clinton. There, India specifically named China as a major threat and motivating factor. Later that year, when the Indian Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, visited New York and the UN, in an extraordinary speech to the Asia Society he stated that the two central pillars of a desirable world order in the 21st century would be the two democracies of U.S. and India.

Leaving aside the pompous self-perception of India as a central foundation for the world order in the next century, what can be clearly discerned as a part of the Indian government's post-Pokhran diplomacy is the message that it wished to send to Washington. The latter should perceive the value of having a potential nuclear ally in India against future 'threats'. Two appeals were implicitly being made in this regard. One was for Washington

to consider the prospects of a 'strategic alliance' with India for which it should greatly downgrade its relationship with Pakistan. Second, was an appeal which can find resonance among the American right, namely, the future value of an Indian nuclear-strategic counterweight to the rising force of China in the coming decades.

**T**o end its post-Pokhran international political-diplomatic isolation, yet retain its new nuclear status, New Delhi accepted Washington as the principal mediator. Throughout the last year, India has sought to impress and reassure the U.S. that as a 'responsible' nuclear power it is willing to act accordingly. Therefore, it is open to joining the CTBT, to participating as a 'sober' member of the nuclear club in the FMCT negotiations, and as evidence of its sobriety, cannot the U.S. appreciate the importance of India's unilateral declaration of No First Use of nuclear weapons or its commitment to developing a 'minimum deterrent' only? That notwithstanding differences between different members of the nuclear club, what unites them all is ultimately more important than what divides them.

Here India was at one with the other NWSS in not wanting the pace, pattern and content of disarmament diplomacy to be set by the non-nuclear weapons states (NNWS). Whether on the anti-nuclear resolution in the UN put forward by the countries comprising the New Agenda Coalition or the issue of bringing stocks into the FMCT discussions, India was on the side of the U.S. Furthermore, India repeatedly sought to reassure the U.S. that it would obey the second unwritten rule of the nuclear club, i.e., India would nonetheless do nothing to encourage other possible proliferators. As the price for securing acceptance of its status and freedom to continue develop-

ing its own weapons system, India would be willing to respect the basic parameters and treaties which have institutionalised the non-proliferation regime. This much was obvious when, immediately after the tests, the Indian government naively declared that it was willing to sign the NPT as a nuclear weapons state, embarrassingly forgetting that the terms of the NPT do not allow this for any country which had not carried out tests before 1 January 1967.

By the time Kargil happened, the U.S. had obviously become the crucial external player openly mediating on the issue to force the Pakistani withdrawal. Indeed, it was U.S. pressure (not Indian military power) that was decisive in shaping the final manner and speed with which the crisis ended. Since the U.S. position on Kargil favoured the Indian stand the Indian elite in its large majority has, with whatever reservations, generally welcomed the U.S. role. However, the Indian government still seeks to maintain the fiction that the Kashmir issue is not being internationalised, although the nuclearisation of South Asia has made this more or less inevitable: if not quite now, then certainly if and when India and Pakistan openly deploy their nuclear weapons systems.

**T**he Indian decision to openly go nuclear has marked a *historic* point of transition in Sino-Indian relations. Unless India refrains from future weaponisation, induction and deployment, it has embarked on a path guaranteed to make China into a strategic-nuclear rival when it was not so before and need never have so become. This elementary truth is what our pronuclearists, of course, repeatedly seek to deny. Either they claim that China has long been such a strategic-nuclear rival, at least since the Sino-Indian

border conflict of 1962, followed by China's nuclear test in 1964. Or that nuclearisation will pave the way for a more 'balanced' and strategically secure relationship which will therefore move in the direction of becoming qualitatively better and less rivalrous for both countries. This is a chimera. Relations have taken a decisively negative turn and everything that has happened since Pokhran II confirms this judgement.

**T**his is because of both objective factors and subjective failings. While the former could not have been avoided, the latter could have but weren't. A major political-diplomatic error, but one difficult for India to have avoided, was to have publicly and repeatedly made the 'Chinese threat' the principal scapegoat and rationale for the Indian decision to test and openly go nuclear. Considering that Sino-Indian relations had been steadily improving over the last 15 years before Pokhran II, and that China had not in any way by word or deed over a long period preceding the tests provoked India, it was both unconvincing and irresponsible for India to have made China out to be the main culprit. Even a year after the tests and despite China's cautious and pragmatic approach to Kargil where it publicly remained neutral, Beijing insists that it is New Delhi's responsibility to make amends for its accusation after Pokhran and to take the initiative to restore proper balance in their mutual ties.

Recognising the danger of so alienating China, the current Indian government has from time to time tried to half-heartedly rectify matters by claiming that China was not the main reason for the Indian decision. Hence the same government which specifically declared China to be the main reason, indeed whose senior spokespersons publicly used the term

'enemy' to describe it, then later had to declare that the Indian bomb was 'not country-specific'. The reasons why India's pro-nuclear elite felt it necessary to cite China as a threat and why the very same elite also vacillates in its attitude towards that country needs to be grasped.

**W**hile certain excesses of language and tone could have been avoided (to the benefit of mutual diplomatic relations), it would have been difficult for India to abjure all reference to China as justification for its going nuclear. Although the principal reason for India taking this step was more due to changing elite self-perceptions and not changed threat perceptions due to any deterioration in the external security environment (there wasn't any such deterioration), every country which has gone nuclear has had to justify doing so by reference to some external threat. For India this had to be China not Pakistan, although reference to the latter was also frequent because talk of the Pakistan threat sells well with the domestic public. That this 'threat' from China has always been an abstract and conjectural one, rather than one seriously felt, was beside the point. India could hardly have justified its going nuclear *solely* by reference to its desire to have global prestige or status.

At the same time, even the most rabid anti-Chinese Indian hawk senses that relations between India and China cannot be placed at the same level as those between India and Pakistan. Even after the Sino-Indian border dispute, the relations between the two countries never quite jelled into a posture of strategic hostility or even of strategic rivalry. Rather, they always operated on a spectrum between the two positions of rivalry and strategic friendship. It was never destined that Sino-Indian

relations should become stabilised at one or the other of these two poles. Hence, the vacillations in the attitudes of Indian pro-nuclearists towards China had this objective foundation which made them realise that treating China as an enemy could become something of a self-fulfilling prophecy to the detriment of Indian security. A certain unease and uncertainty has, therefore, always surrounded the issue of how India should behave towards China.

**B**ut Pokhran II has decisively shifted the ground on which Sino-Indian relations have been based. It marked a major shift initiated by India to *re-position* the fulcrum of their mutual relations much closer than ever before to the pole of 'strategic rivalry' even if not yet near the more extreme end of 'strategic hostility'. The Chinese government has always been a highly pragmatic one and can be expected to continue behaving pragmatically. This means it will continue to search for better relations with India despite Pokhran II. But whatever the fluctuations and variations in Sino-Indian relations as may be expressed in future public communiqués and policy statements emanating from both capitals, China will remain inflexible on two counts. It has categorically opposed the Indian decision to go nuclear and called on it (for example, UN Resolution 1172) to roll back to non-nuclear status. Furthermore, whatever India's declared positions, it is waiting to see in what manner India develops its nuclear capabilities and arsenals.

In this regard, the evidence provided over the last year speaks volumes. Except for the left parties, no other major contender for political power in India is willing to reverse the direction the country set upon after Pokhran II. The purpose of those tests

would be lost, in the eyes of all such parties, if India did not now go on to further weaponise, induct and eventually openly deploy a complete if rudimentary nuclear weapons system. But developing such a weapons system merely to have an 'adequate' deterrent against Pakistan would be pointless. If Pakistan was the only issue, better then to denuclearise the region.

No, the purpose of those tests and the direction that India is now taking is clearly to eventually build some kind of a 'credible deterrent equation' vis-à-vis China. That means openly targeting China with long-range missiles and delivery systems, alongside building an 'adequate' second-strike capacity. India may not even achieve such a second-strike capacity against China (such are the technical difficulties) but the very fact of systematically targeting China with its nuclear weapons system is to make China a strategic rival and opponent and to force China to treat India in the same way.

**I**n the last year, China has watched India test ballistic missiles over a longer range than ever before. These tests and the efforts to extend missile range have an obvious purpose in mind—to eventually target China. The Agni II missile tests were successfully carried out over a range of 1500 to 2000 kilometres. Efforts to extend this range are, of course, well underway. China is not likely to be too disturbed by technology demonstration tests even if these are successful over a range which can target major Chinese population centres. It is when India is able to go in for serial production of missiles with the requisite range and deploys them widely that the point of no retreat may be reached in Sino-Indian relations.

Theoretically, this allows some time for the possibility of reversal of

Indian nuclear plans and therefore for retrieval of Sino-Indian relations from the brink. But there is no evidence that any Indian government, now or in the future, will contemplate a reversal of the path it took after Pokhran II unless forced to do so by domestic-cum-external pressure. China then is waiting and watching in full awareness that this is a new and aggressive Indian elite obsessed with the desire to 'match' China. On the nuclear front, China will go by Indian capabilities and not by its official statements of good intent. Indeed, even at the level of intent, the DND indicates Indian determination to build a deterrent against 'any state or entity', and certainly to target China ('a targeting policy shall form part of the system').

There is simply no escape from pursuing regional nuclear disarmament. Even as we simultaneously pursue global disarmament we cannot afford to link one with the other such that regional disarmament cannot or should not be accomplished before total global disarmament. The central need today is to organise enough pressure to restrain India and Pakistan from going ahead with further weaponisation, induction and deployment. India is the pace-setter here. Pakistan has already officially stated that it will not be the first to deploy but will follow India. This is consistent with Pakistan's historical record as the 'reactor' to India in its nuclear policies though not necessarily in its preparations. The longer the firebreak between the current situation and the point when open deployment might take place, the greater the chances of reversing the process of nuclearisation altogether. Preventing such deployment is the immediate goal, denuclearising the region, for example through the establishment of a South Asian nuclear weapons free zone, the longer-term one.



# India's security environment

DEEPA OLLAPALLY

HISTORICALLY, nuclear weapons have ostensibly been for the purpose of increasing security. But gaining prestige has been a near equal, if unstated, preference. How else can one explain the continued nuclear weapons arsenals of Great Britain and France? In India's case, both concerns about security and frustrations about international equity and status seem plausible motivations. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to disentangle them and marshal evidence one way or the other. In any event, security is too elusive a concept to abstractly define or concretely procure.

India's nuclear tests of May 1998 were clearly conducted with an eye to the current as well as future environment, particularly the rise of China. They also seem to have been carried out to ensure that at a minimum, India's place at the regional table of great powers in Asia in the future would not be in question. Given that important Asia-Pacific groupings such as APEC do not include India yet, and that Asia in the western imagination tends to stop at Southeast Asia's border, it is not surprising if a level of

angst exists in New Delhi over India's post independence role.

In South Asia, India is by far predominant – in terms of population, size, market and industry. Yet in politico-strategic terms, India has been frustrated and thwarted by the Indo-Pakistan conflict, wherein Pakistan has managed to 'borrow power' from external actors, notably the U.S. and China, to offset India's power. Such an outcome, however, was predicated upon the existence of the Cold War and Pakistan's centrality to American containment of the erstwhile Soviet Union, culminating with the Afghan war. With the end of the Cold War, there continue to be unfolding shifts of strategic preferences for India, the U.S. and others which could have more favourable, deeper and longer term implications for Indian security.

The twin economic and strategic crises of 1991, when India's foreign exchange reserves hit a low of barely a fortnight worth of imports and the basic contours of Indian foreign policy was challenged by the collapse of the Soviet Union, were two important bellwethers that could be seen as pushing India over the edge toward a more rapid economic liberalization policy and a reconsideration of strategic

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<sup>†</sup> The views expressed are strictly the author's own.

policy. The latter included both activism and openness vis-à-vis Southeast Asia as well as a more nuanced understanding of the cross-cutting cleavages of the international system in general in a post Cold War world in which rigid ideologies and shrill rhetoric hardly struck any chords or were counterproductive. In response to the changes India has initiated, the country has been on everyone's list of 'big emerging markets' for much of this decade and, at least in the economic realm, the major international actors, for their own self-interests, would like to see India emerge a winner.

This backdrop needs to be kept in mind when Indian security in the current period is considered, post nuclear and post Kargil. It would be a mistake to look at the current situation in isolation from the broader schema of global and regional contexts.

**F**or states with constrained resources such as India, the tradeoff between military and economic priorities is unavoidable. In many ways, India's long-held nuclear ambiguity had managed to accomplish this tradeoff in a relatively economic yet fairly convincing way militarily. Whether India's nuclear 'option' remained entirely credible after 24 years of seeming inaction is of course open to question. But that it was a cost effective response to security compulsions and international pressures is difficult to argue against. Nuclear ambiguity also had the virtue of being a posture which was developed for the unique domestic and international circumstances faced by India, the handiwork of a complex civilization with numerous cross-currents which could easily tolerate and accommodate 'ambiguity' in contrast to the western predisposition.

Having conducted the tests and released a draft nuclear doctrine,

India's current nuclear stance seems to be one designed to leave little doubt that the country is serious about developing its nuclear weapons. The clear message is that India's decision to go nuclear is irrevocable and not open to negotiation. The rather explicitly belaboured draft doctrine seems to be a near antithesis of the prior position whose hallmark was ambiguity. Yet, while the document is unambiguous on strategic intentions, it is much less specific on the size and design of the so-called minimum deterrent. The time horizon for developing the deterrent appears to be long term – up to 30 years according to some of the doctrine's architects. Thus, the elements of ambiguity have not entirely evaporated, though from the perspective of the domestic military-economic trade-off as well as the diplomatic front, the persistence of a certain degree of ambiguity could be seen as welcome.

**A**fter the May 1998 tests, analysts, particularly in the West, had pointed to the lack of articulated strategic doctrines and command and control capabilities to accompany India's and Pakistan's weapons programme as dangerous and unstable. In the talks between Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh and U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, one of the main topics related to India's nuclear posture, prodding India to be more transparent. Meanwhile, Indian officials and experts had been putting forth the proposition that a full-blown doctrine was not needed given India's limited objectives. One important analyst has pointed to differences between the grand deterrence strategy of the U.S. and the minimum deterrence India will practice, emphasizing that while the U.S. philosophy is complex and designed to achieve a large number of variable objectives, the Indian deterrent is required 'purely

as a defensive instrument to ensure that no outside power is tempted to coerce the country.'<sup>1</sup> Another well-placed expert has suggested that, 'We don't fall into the standard pattern of declared doctrines, specific weapons, delivery capabilities or force postures,' adding that minimum deterrence would make it credible that 'aggressive acts' would result in a response even without the doctrinal apparatus.<sup>2</sup>

**W**hile a number of factors could have motivated the new Indian draft doctrine, the American attempt to draw out India was one likely catalyst. Clearly, the U.S. was attempting to pressure India toward a posture which would be as restrained and muted as possible. But nuclear doctrines themselves tend to take on a life and logic of their own. It is not entirely surprising if the Indian draft looks very much like such doctrines elsewhere, and not some unique Indian version. The 'no first use' and 'no use against non nuclear weapon states' declarations are important features of the new draft doctrine. The American presumption that outside pressure would produce something different was obviously misplaced, but in a way predictable. One lesson is that the acceptance of the cautious ambiguity projected by India even after the tests may have been the best of all possible outcomes for India as well as its detractors if we consider the security-economic tradeoffs.

The exact costs of a triad based nuclear force and India's ability to absorb the costs remain matters of contention, in part based on differing assumptions regarding the size of the

1 Vijay K. Nair, 'The Structure of an Indian Nuclear Deterrent', in Amitabh Mattoo (ed.), *India's Nuclear Deterrent: Pokhran II and Beyond*, Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi, 1998, p. 83

2 S. Rajagopal, *The Times of India*, 11 February 1999

nuclear force, projected economic growth rates and the time horizon. The debate regarding the level of weaponization continues, and may be expected to pick up steam once the discussion is taken up in Parliament. The two levels most often discussed are in the low range of 60-130 weapons depending on the source, versus a high of 300-400 warheads which approximates the Chinese, British and French minimum deterrents.

★ **A**ccording to figures quoted by Bharat Karnad, a member of the National Security Advisory Board, the cost of the larger triadic arsenal over a 30 year period is estimated at approximately Rs 700 billion. He goes on to note that if the Indian economy grew at a rate of 7% a year, then in 2030, the total cost would be 0.7% of India's GNP. Currently, India reportedly spends 2.3% of its GDP on defence, as compared to Pakistan's 5%. Pakistan's expenditure on its nuclear programme has traditionally been less transparent than India's.

★ Pakistan can ill-afford a major nuclear buildup, with the post-testing sanctions causing a near default on its external debt. Approximately two-thirds of Pakistan's budgetary expenses for 1999-2000 are devoted to defence and debt servicing, while the total expenditure on development is to be less than one half of that of debt servicing. This structure of budgetary expenditure is neither sustainable nor consistent with economic growth.<sup>3</sup>

★ In contrast, the Indian economy was only marginally affected by the sanctions, and India has received high marks from the International Monetary Fund for avoiding the worst of the Asian financial crisis, with growth rates being maintained at a level close to the average seen over the past dec-

ade. While Pakistan's economy is far weaker than India's, it would be extremely risky for the Indian leadership to take comfort in this fact. An unstable and unpredictable Pakistan reeling under economic pressures could confront India with the type of volatility that can only be counterproductive. Meanwhile, India has to face the unfavourable position that China has an economy three times its size and has a 30 year lead in nuclear and missile development.

**T**he issue of military-economic tradeoffs then is closely related to how minimum the 'minimum deterrent' will be. Two different kinds of examples are at hand in this connection. In the case of the U.S., as early as 1964, Defence Secretary Robert McNamara had concluded that the existing arsenal of approximately 400 nuclear weapons amounted to a credible deterrent. The mindless growth and overkill of U.S. weapons to over 70,000 and the staggering costs of more than five trillion dollars stand as the worst possible case the world has seen. Likewise, the Soviet Union's collapse under the weight of its military expenditure.

If the second tier nuclear powers are taken into account however, it would appear that the learning curve is quite steep with a fairly steady equilibrium, particularly for France and Britain. In other words, neither country would appear to have careened out of control in its weapons acquisitions. How India will ultimately resolve the security-economic tradeoff is unclear. Security is a highly elastic concept which is open to wide interpretation. But if past Indian behaviour is any guide, the dominant tendency will be to craft a persuasive but economically viable posture.

At this juncture, there are two developments which make it unlikely

that India could define security in a highly elastic fashion, with the nuclear accoutrements to support it. Should India move seriously in the direction of signing the CTBT and participate in a prospective FMCT, together these treaties would impose qualitative as well as quantitative limitations on India's nuclear development. In light of the nuclear weapon states already having conducted more than 2,000 tests, and with the U.S. and Russia awash in plutonium and highly enriched uranium, an agreement by India to keep its arsenal at a much lower level of capability needs to be seen as a historic step. For all practical purposes, India would then be locked into a position of genuine 'minimum deterrence', and essentially guarantee that the blind build up by the current purveyors of nonproliferation would not be emulated, indeed, could not be emulated. These treaties would of course have the likely effect of freezing the status quo which, in relative terms, would give India an advantage over Pakistan, China an advantage over India, and the U.S. and Russia an advantage over China.

**I**ndia cannot achieve real security by itself; the policies of China and Pakistan have to be taken into account. So far, China has taken the position that it will discuss nuclear arms control and threat reduction only with other P-5 countries. It has refused to allow discussion of its nuclear arms with others. Given India's new status, the Chinese stand is increasingly untenable and at some point soon, some flexibility on their part will become necessary, whether they like it or not. At the moment at least, Sino-Indian relations appear stable and even predictable. The Indo-Pakistan relationship, on the other hand, has gone off track with no immediate indication of how it may be salvaged. Most impor-

3 'Pakistan: A Fragile Economy', *South Asia Monitor* 11, 1 July 1999

tantly, Pakistan appears to be a country without clear direction which introduces a level of uncertainty that is disquieting.

**D**eterrence optimists with reference to a nuclear subcontinent had placed their belief in the Indian and Pakistani leadership playing by the so-called rules of the game. The presumption was that the worst fears of the 'spiral' theorists would be more than moderated by a rational commitment to make deterrence work. In the months immediately following the tests, both Prime Minister Vajpayee and Nawaz Sharif showed serious signs that they were committed to avoiding the 'spiral' path. In the wake of Kargil, it would seem that such faith may have been misplaced in the case of Pakistan.

Pakistan's willingness to engage in such high risk taking and adventurism as seen in Kargil under the nuclear shadow, begs the question of just how the nuclear equation is being interpreted by Islamabad. That the Kargil intervention was launched just as the nuclear fear was being dampened through diplomacy such as the Lahore summit, is particularly sobering. If Pakistan's assessment is that the nuclear status of South Asia will now allow it greater freedom to stoke and perpetuate low intensity war against India in the confidence that India will not retaliate with strategic strikes given possible consequences, instability in the subcontinent could reach a new high.

In this connection, the effect of the American and even Chinese reaction to Pakistan regarding Kargil has no doubt been to deflate Pakistani expectations about what might be accomplished behind the nuclear curtain. There appears to be an increasing international consensus that the borders in the subcontinent cannot be

changed by force particularly given the nuclear backdrop, and to that extent the new environment would hem in Pakistani ambitions in Kashmir. India's challenge will be to not overreact and wittingly or unwittingly play into Pakistan's hands.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the idea of regional cooperation, especially through trade, has gained increasing legitimacy. Indeed, regional economics appears to be the wave of the future. South Asia has lagged behind in this regard with the South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA) not having taken off since its inception in 1995. India has accorded most favoured nation status to Pakistan which has not been reciprocated. The proposal for India to buy surplus power from Pakistan which had gained momentum after the Lahore meeting makes economic sense for both countries and could have served as a successful example. Given the way in which the electric power grid system is organized, it appeared to be more cost-effective for Pakistan to sell power to India for use in Punjab than to other further removed locations in Pakistan.

**F**rom time to time, there have been proposals about considering the building of a gas pipeline from Central Asia to India through Pakistan. Of course, whatever seems economically beneficial would have to be politically feasible as well, but India may need to be bold and imaginative. Unfortunately, while the West has been a strong champion of regional economic cooperation, the most recent U.S. efforts to secure a gas pipeline from the Caucasus in the future, which will completely bypass Iran and Russia, suggests that power politics is a hard habit to break. The reality may be that geopolitics will reign over economics, but in the case of India and Pakistan, there

may be ways in which reliability of energy supply can be ensured if for example, the enterprise involves an international consortium of companies with strong stakes in its continuing viability.

The groundwork for a more secure South Asian environment could come through building greater economic interaction. The idea of cooperative security in which one country has a stake in the well-being of its adversary may be a long way off from taking hold in the subcontinent, but the post nuclear situation is that each country's security and welfare more than ever depends on the stability and cooperation of the other country.

**I**n what Robert Jervis has called the 'illogic' of the nuclear revolution, a government is no longer confidently able to protect the state's inhabitants under conditions of deterrence and mutually assured destruction. There is no 'defence' available against nuclear weapons as such, and the active 'cooperation' of the adversary would be needed to try and guarantee against any catastrophe. It then becomes critically important to pull back from a highly competitive security stance.

In this connection, it is worth noting that the one area of relatively stable cooperation between India and Pakistan despite the vicissitudes of their relations, has been in the nuclear arena. For example, the agreement to not attack each other's nuclear installations, and the commitment to exchange a list of such installations periodically has held, despite the ups and downs. The need for confidence building measures in this sphere is accepted by both parties and there is no reason why this interaction cannot be deepened. Despite the tests and the draft doctrine, there is still room for nuclear restraint and there appears to be a serious search by experts for ways

to reduce the danger from an overt nuclear position.

Some Indian analysts have proposed de-mating, i.e., keeping warheads separated from their delivery vehicles. Accidental or precipitous use of nuclear weapons would be inhibited by this posture which stops short of full readiness. One of the world's foremost scholars on nuclear safety at the Brookings Institution concludes that if this route is taken by India, it could and should become a 'model' for other nuclear states.<sup>4</sup> Another expert notes that India and even Pakistan in the past, may have followed a 'deliberate policy to maintain a de-alerted status' and delayed launch procedure strategy to minimize accidents, which if continued in some fashion would address some of the most critical command and control problems.<sup>5</sup>

**H**ow far the nuclear tests and weaponization implies a break with India's past tendency to fashion security policies which were persuasive but economic is still an open question. In other words, the issue is whether the centrist and accommodative inclinations of the Indian polity will prevail and militate against the more extreme positions. In making its choice India, as in the past, is much more likely to be responsive to domestic compulsions and elite conceptions of security interests than to outside pressure. In this context, expressions of American dismay at India's nuclear doctrine is

not likely to be heeded, in part because it has never been easy to square U.S. nuclear profligacy with appeals for nuclear abstinence and restraint in the developing world.

India's party politics have historically pushed policies toward the centre, and with the onset of serious coalition politics, this aspect will get even stronger. The coalitions are increasingly being made up of smaller, regional parties with interests that are driven by local interests. These parties will be forced to carefully consider the economic-military tradeoffs and their impact on votes. For example, as it turned out, the substantial popular support the BJP government received in the aftermath of the nuclear tests did not immunize the ruling coalition against the strong negative reaction of the public to the price of onions going up. Clearly there is a limit to the transferability of goodwill from one policy sector to another.

**P**ractically all the political parties are in agreement regarding the need to continue the liberalization programme begun in 1991. Since at least the mid 1980s, there is a growing global consensus that the winning strategy in international relations lies with successful economics. As a military giant but an economic midget, the Soviet Union's collapse remains an object lesson for others. The biggest challenge facing India will be to not stretch its resources such that genuine balanced development is subverted and its economic experiment thrown off course. In the post independence period, India missed a place at the high table of regional powers in part because of its economic weakness. It now has an opportunity to redress that outcome, but will have to be extremely watchful regarding the manner in which the inevitable military economic tradeoffs are made.

4. Bruce Blair, *Cooperation on Nuclear Weapons Safety*, lecture delivered at a seminar on Preventive Diplomacy: Reflections on Overcoming Enmity Through Contacts, U.S. Institute of Peace, Washington, D.C., 9 April 1999

5. W.P.S. Sidhu, 'India's Security and Nuclear Risk Reduction Measures', in W.P.S. Sidhu, Brian Cloughley, John Hawes and Teresita Schaffer, *Nuclear Risk Reduction Measures in Southern Asia*, Henry L. Stimson Center, Report No. 26, November 1998, pp. 36-37.

# Knowing the General

J N DIXIT

I assumed charge as India's Ambassador to Pakistan a little more than a decade ago in May 1989. My initial weeks in Islamabad and Lahore were spent in making acquaintance with not just governmental and political figures or senior civil servants and army officers but also authors and senior journalists, particularly those with a feel for the history of the subcontinent and a rational approach towards India. One of the most enlightened and sober among these was the late Mazar Ali Khan, friend of Jawaharlal Nehru and a host of our national leaders who, though a participant in the Indian freedom movement, had nevertheless adjusted to the realities of the Partition without bitterness or prejudice.

Benazir Bhutto had become prime minister and democracy stood revived in Pakistan after a long gap of eleven years. There was an atmosphere of hope about Pakistan emerging as a liberal democracy. I spoke to Mazar Ali Khan about this sense of hope and optimism which India shared. His response surprised me

because his prognosis about the prospects for democracy in Pakistan was negative. With the benefit of hindsight and the passage of nearly ten years, I now see just how perceptive and farsighted he was.

In the autumn of 1989 he told me that while feeling good about democracy in Pakistan was welcome and desirable, it would take another generation or two for democracy to take root. He said that there were three characteristics of the Pakistani polity which would handicap democracy. First, the Pakistani leadership had little experience of a mass movement or a freedom struggle. Therefore, there were limited psychological or emotional linkages between the masses and the leadership. Second, the power structure of Pakistan had come to be dominated by the military, bureaucracy and the feudal elite, and the entrenched interests of this elite were unlikely to survive the establishment of representative democracy.

Third, successive Pakistani governments were deliberately averse

to basic economic reforms like land reforms, structuring of fiscal policies aimed at distributive justice and so on. Khan expressed the view that given this context, democracy in Pakistan was likely to remain an interim phenomenon which would be replaced by military regimes whenever the Pakistani state faced situations of crisis of confidence or major economic difficulties. This assessment is valid if one looks into the circumstances of the Ayub Khan takeover in 1958, Zia-ul-Haq toppling Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and now, Pervez Musharraf ousting the elected government of Nawaz Sharif.

Mazar Ali Khan did not refer to an additional dimension of this recurrent phenomenon, that of the Pakistani armed forces assuming a supra governmental role as the articulator of the 'ideology of Pakistan' and as the supreme protector of the Pakistani state – a self-assumed role which transcends constitutional arrangements, laws or accepted norms of democracy. A comparative study of the public pronouncements made by the four military supremos of Pakistan over the last 41 years (Ayub Khan, Yahya Khan, Zia-ul-Haq and Pervez Musharraf), shows one common and assertive claim – that the army took over power because of the ineptitude, corruption and venality of civilian governments, to preserve Pakistan's unity and integrity and to provide good governance to the people of Pakistan.

**E**ven when democracy was permitted a revival in Pakistan after the death of Zia-ul-Haq, the then armed forces chief, General Aslam Beg, had laid down three preconditions to Benazir Bhutto before she was allowed to take the oath of office as prime minister. First, that she would not interfere in any manner in the organisational and administrative work of the armed forces; that she would abide by the

advice of the armed forces chiefs. Second, that she would not make any changes in Pakistan's foreign and defence policies and take any decision reducing defence expenditure without the consent of the defence chiefs. Third, that she would not interfere with Pakistan's nuclear weaponisation and missile programmes. She accepted all the three preconditions, as did her successors, both temporary and permanent, like Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi, Nawaz Sharif and Moin Qureshi.

**I**t was Nawaz Sharif's attempt in his most recent tenure to move away from these preconditions which resulted in his ouster by Pervez Musharraf. He interfered with the organisational and administrative aspects of the armed forces, leading to the resignation of two service chiefs, General Jahangir Karamat and Admiral Bukhari, and attempted the dismissal of a third one, General Pervez Musharraf. He also experimented with foreign and defence policy initiatives without the consent of the army chief. He gave indications of wanting to assume apex level executive control over Pakistan's nuclear weapons and missiles policies. His willingness to enter into a dialogue with India, to put in place strategic confidence building measures after the Pokhran-Chagai tests, and his agreeing to the withdrawal of Pakistani troops behind the Line of Control during the Kargil conflict, were decisions which the Pakistani armed forces establishment did not endorse.

There were additional reasons contributing to Nawaz Sharif's overthrow and the revival of military rule in Pakistan. But regardless, the prospects are that India will have to deal with Pervez Musharraf's military regime, whatever be the labels assumed by the Pakistan government. It would be impractical as well as irra-

tional for India to refuse to deal with the Musharraf government because Pakistan is India's most important South Asian neighbour in some respects. This cannot be wished away. Second, the people of Pakistan themselves have welcomed the Musharraf government. Apart from a section of Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League, there is general support for the new military regime. Third, it is likely that General Musharraf will remain in effective power for at least three to five years, unless some unforeseen crisis or event results in his removal.

**I**t would, therefore, be pertinent to take note of the professional background and orientations of Pervez Musharraf to make an assessment of likely policies that he may follow and to understand how he might manage Pakistan's internal or external predicaments and concerns. To analyse the last point first, Musharraf's public pronouncements do indicate some clear directions. He has repeated, more than once since 12 October, that he will not provide any definite timeframe for the restoration of democracy in Pakistan. He has affirmed this not only to the domestic media, but without any inhibitions to the BBC and the CNN.

Second, he has clearly indicated that he will undertake a systematic neutralisation of other power centres in Pakistani society which could oppose him. He has imprisoned Nawaz Sharif and charged him with high treason and corruption; indicated that legal prosecutory actions against Benazir Bhutto will continue and refused her safe passage back to Pakistan; arrested a number of prominent politicians, both from the Pakistan Muslim League and the People's Party of Pakistan on charges of corruption and serious financial fraud.

He has frozen their bank assets and threatened others with imprisonment and legal action if they do not make good their illegal acquisitions by paying back the banks and financial institutions.

Musharraf has announced an agenda for governance in which restoring economic probity, elimination of corruption, restoration of a clean administration, ensuring national cohesion and discipline enjoy top priority. His proclaimed national security and foreign policy objectives are along expected lines – desiring strong and expanded relations with the major powers, working for peace and stability in the region, sustaining Pakistan's nuclear weapons and missile weaponisation policies, and strengthening ties with the Islamic countries.

**A**s far as India is concerned, his intentions can, at best, be read as the maintenance of a posture of political and diplomatic confrontation and, at worst, as a sustained campaign of subversion and military intrusion. He does not attach much importance to the discussions held and decisions taken at the Lahore meeting of Prime Minister's Vajpayee and Nawaz Sharif in February 1999 and feels that Indo-Pakistan dialogue would be useful only if India discusses the Kashmir issue with Pakistan in a meaningful manner (which means India should accept Pakistani suggestions about a solution to the issue). Finally, he has clarified that his pulling back Pakistani troops from the Indo-Pakistan frontier will not extend to the LOC in Jammu and Kashmir.

As for the international reaction to his assumption of power and his policies, he does not seem perturbed about criticism from the Commonwealth or other sources. He stands reassured about having a working relationship with powers which are

important to him – namely, the U.S., China, the Islamic countries, Western Europe and Japan. His only point of concern at this stage relates to the sanctions imposed on Pakistan by multilateral financial institutions and indications that President Clinton might bypass Pakistan during his intended visit to South Asia in early 2000.

**M**ore relevant than taking note of these policy orientations is the need to interrogate his professional background and persona, since we have to cope with him as the head of government of a country with which our relations have been difficult and tense for nearly half a century. Pervez Musharraf belongs to a U.P. Muslim family. His grandparents and parents were residents of Delhi in the period immediately before Partition. Born around 1943, he migrated to Pakistan at the age of four. He grew up in Karachi and then in Gujranwalla, ultimately being commissioned into the artillery branch of the Pakistan Army in 1964. He had a comparatively routine career till President Zia-ul-Haq took notice of him because of his reputation as a devout Muslim officer and his linkages with a number of *Islam-pasand* politicians of Pakistan. Like Zia-ul-Haq, General Musharraf has strong links with the Jamat-e-Islami of Pakistan.

His first significant assignment from Zia-ul-Haq was to take charge of the training of mercenaries recruited from various Muslim countries for fighting against Soviet troops in Afghanistan in the concerned Directorate of Inter Services Intelligence. It is reported that during this period he built contacts with Osama bin Laden, who was originally brought into Afghanistan by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency for constructing bunkers and tunnels for Afghan

*mujahideen* in different theatres of the conflict in Afghanistan.

As part of his assignment of training the mercenaries, Musharraf was also involved in financing their operations with the assistance of Pakistani narcotic smugglers operating in the NWFP of Pakistan. An interesting sidelight to this phase of his career is that while the intelligence establishments of both U.S.A. and Pakistan valued his services, the narcotics control establishment of the U.S. Government was not enamoured of the General. This was one of the reasons that General Musharraf remains an exception in the Pakistani officer cadre, in that he did not train at any U.S. military institution, attending training courses only in the U.K.

**T**he year 1987 marked a watershed in Musharraf's career. He was made brigade commander of the newly raised Special Services Group tasked to push back Indian forces from the heights of Siachen. He was responsible for a major attack on the Indian military post at Bilafond La in the Siachen sector in September 1987. His forces were decisively defeated by the Indian troops. In summer 1988 he was specially assigned to suppress a Shia revolt against the Sunni dominated administration in the Gilgit region. For this operation, in which hundreds of people were massacred and displaced, General Musharraf supplemented his troops with tribesmen from NWFP and Afghanistan.

Pakistani newspapers and magazines like the *Dawn* and *Herald* reported that Musharraf's troops invaded the Gilgit district along the Karakoram highway, destroyed crops and houses and killed a large portion of the rural population. He followed this up by bringing in Punjabis and Pathans and settled them in Gilgit and Baltistan in order to reduce the major-



rity of Kashmiri Shias, the original inhabitants of the area, thereby changing the demography of the Gilgit region. Musharraf spent seven years with the Special Services Group in two separate assignments and sees himself as the most knowledgeable expert on mountain warfare in the Pakistani armed forces. He values his identity as a commando more than as a gunner.

**T**he culmination of his field assignments was his appointment as force commander, Northern Areas, placing him in charge of all military and subversive operations against Jammu and Kashmir. This assignment also brought him in close touch with senior officials of the ISI and extremist Islamic groups dealing with Afghanistan and subversion in J&K. It was during the late '80s that Pervez Musharraf established close links with groups like the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, Lakshar-e-Taiba and Tabligi Jamaat. It is reported that Pervez Musharraf also forged links with Osama bin Laden's International Islamic Front for *jihad* against the U.S.A. and Israel.

Interestingly, Pervez Musharraf reportedly was directly involved with an unsuccessful attempt at a military coup against Benazir Bhutto in the autumn of 1995. The attempt was allegedly led by Major General Zaheer-ul-Tslam Abbasi, who had succeeded Musharraf as force commander Northern Areas. Pakistani media reported that had the coup succeeded, General Musharraf would have been the favoured candidate to become head of state. Both Abbasi and General Aziz, who was Musharraf's chief of staff in 1999, were reported to be part of this coup. Throughout the '90s, Pervez Musharraf and his senior associates were involved in arranging finance and arms to various secession-

ist groups and mercenaries intruding into Jammu and Kashmir.

Coming to more recent developments, Pervez Musharraf was not enthusiastic about the Lahore meeting between Nawaz Sharif and Vajpayee. Even while the meeting was taking place, Pervez Musharraf had finalised plans for attacking India along the LOC in the Kargil sector of Jammu and Kashmir. He was the principal architect of the fourth major military conflict between India and Pakistan. Musharraf was confident about success in the Kargil venture because in his assessment India's establishment was plagued by political uncertainty and that the morale of the Indian armed forces was low due to the poor leadership of Defence Minister George Fernandes and soft leadership of Atal Behari Vajpayee. In fact, during the initial stages of the Kargil conflict, the former chief of the ISI, Lt. General Assad Durrani, went to the extent of asserting that George Fernandes 'was perhaps the best Indian defence minister that Pakistan could hope for?'

**A** study by the Indian Institute for Topical Studies summarises Pervez Musharraf's approach towards India and the Kashmir question as follows:

- \* The BJP is a party of paper tigers, known more for its 'verbosity' than action.
- \* Pakistan's nuclear and missile capability has ensured that India would not retaliate against Pakistan for occupying the ridges in the Kargil area.
- \* A fear of the possible use of nuclear weapons would invite western intervention, thereby internationalising Kashmir.
- \* Pakistan should agree to a ceasefire only if allowed to remain in occupation of Indian territory. There should be no question of a restoration of the *status quo ante*.

Further, through interviews and speeches given by General Musharraf since October 1998, his thinking seems to indicate that:

- \* The acquisition of Kashmir by Pakistan can wait. What is more important is to keep the Indian Army bleeding in Kashmir, just what the mujahideen did to Soviet troops in Afghanistan.
- \* Even if the Kashmir issue were to be resolved it cannot result in normal relations between India and Pakistan because Pakistan, by frustrating India's ambition of emerging as a major Asian power on par with China and Japan, would continue to be a thorn in India's flesh. And, so long as it does so, Pakistan would continue to enjoy the backing of China and Japan.

**I**t is obvious that Musharraf's predictions went wrong and his Kargil exercise proved to be a misadventure. This defeat probably rankles and thus the motivation for avenging this setback will underpin his policies unless the assumption of supreme power forces him to be more realistic and responsible.

India should be conscious that it is an assertive, theologically committed, military figure with whom she will have to deal with as the head of state of Pakistan in the foreseeable future. Practical considerations demand that we should be willing for a dialogue with him. The exercise, however, should be based on a clear understanding of his ideological and political orientation and his antagonistic mindset keeping in view his professional background.

For the present, we should make haste slowly. The timing, substance and nature of the dialogue should be calmly determined keeping our national interest in view. Neither hostility nor anxiety should inform our policies towards Pakistan.

# A new beginning?

RADHA KUMAR

OVER the past year India and the United States have shown a new cordiality towards each other. There has been a sharp increase in government to government contacts, and a gradual increase in US public interest in India and Indian elite support for improved Indo-US relations. The US has shown greater understanding of India's security concerns, while India has shown renewed interest in US economic concerns, for example, by opening up the insurance sector to foreign investment. The two countries are beginning to agree on the debated international threat of terrorism, especially by fundamentalist militias.

After the Kargil conflict, US policy towards an Indo-Pakistani peace process has been more sympathetic to Indian dilemmas. As far as international affairs go, India has agreed to join the US, Poland and Britain in an initiative to promote democracy world-wide, and has indicated a willingness to rethink some of its traditional postures towards the West and

the Middle East. After a gap of over 20 years, a US President, Bill Clinton, will visit India in early 2000. It is in his term that the department for South Asian affairs has become full-fledged, instead of a sub-set, and there has been a flurry of visits by different ministries, including a recent visit by US Energy Secretary, Bill Richardson.

How much does all this add up to, and what does it signify? Obviously, the burgeoning Indo-US relation does not compare to the US' relation to Europe, or in Asia to China or Japan or South Korea or the South-East Asian nations or Australia. Unlike these, it is just beginning and it is difficult to predict how far and how fast it will develop. As yet, it is not even clear whether the US government will lift sanctions against India following the tests, or withdraw their opposition to the release of World Bank loans.

What is clear is that both governments are interested in developing strong relations, and are willing to

overcome the baggage of the Cold War years. This is a major change, which has been in the making through the 1990s but has suffered important shifts and starts as Indian governments rose and fell. Now it would seem, however, that there is a broad-based consensus both within India and the US in support of improved relations (to the extent that Republican candidate George Bush named India as a coming power, whatever that means). In order to assess the nature of this change, it might be useful to separate what are three interconnected issues: one, bilateral Indo-US relations; two, Indo-US relations in international affairs; and three, Indo-US-Pakistan relations.

**A**s far as bilateral Indo-US relations go, the two countries have been exploring ways to accommodate each other's economic interests for some years and continue to do so. This is a process which is likely to expand, though not perhaps at the pace which the US would want, or on the terms which India would require. The hitches in the process are partly having to find a via media between the differing priorities of the US and India, lack of an aggressive statement of economic priorities on the Indian side, and US reluctance to engage seriously with India's economic and development problems.

As Cogentrix's proposed power project in Karnataka shows, there are innumerable hitches in India's approval process; on the other hand, Cogentrix's terms – that the state electricity board cover losses caused by default and theft – is obviously of concern when Indian electricity boards are impoverished precisely because they are incapable of collecting debts or checking theft (the ongoing and mounting problems of Pakistan's state-run electricity corporation with US power producers is a case in point).

India's problems are further compounded by uneven implementing institutions and insufficient vision of the sectors which could benefit most. For example, with the skills and adaptability which many lower middle class Indian groups display – most of all, fluent English – India could well become an important international service provider. Similarly, with an investment outlay that Indian agencies can well afford, India could become an important international tourist destination. Worst of all, the Indian government has shown little interest in either developing a social safety net, or pushing for its consideration in world economic fora.

It is salutary that while India opposed linking preferential trade to labour standards in the recent Seattle round of the World Trade Organization's negotiations, she did not push for a different category of social clauses, which would, for example, prescribe multilateral investment by both business and governments to raise labour standards and create social safety nets in developing countries. Nevertheless, while these are difficult problems, they are not insuperable, and over the past decade the two countries have moved closer on points of common interest, such as information technology, while working on lessening areas of disparity. There is also growing interest in state level economic exchanges, for example, between the US and the southern Indian states (The US has long worked at this level). Health is another area of potential cooperation, especially on AIDS.

**A**s far as India is concerned, a major drawback thus far has been the Indian government's over-reliance on government to government negotiations instead of cultivating the Indian diaspora in the US to aid and advise it

on how to broaden India's access in the US. This situation is gradually beginning to change, as the Indian government starts to recognize the rapid increase of Indian-American visibility in the US economy – most notably India's new venture fund for information technology and her courting of Silicon Valley Indians.

But India's US missions are still comparatively lazy. This is especially so when it comes to projecting India's development needs. The Indian government does little to increase awareness abroad of the country's needs or poverty alleviation programmes, and has made little effort to seek innovative ways to advance development cooperation. For example, the UN Development Programme's initiatives to harness business to development has proved helpful in environmental and employment generation schemes, and could be an example worth following independently.

**O**n foreign and security policies, however, it is more difficult to develop bilateral relations. The Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests locked the two countries together in international security concerns and escalated the Kashmir conflict, even, it is rumoured, to a point at which Pakistan considered using a nuclear threat during the Kargil war. India has worked hard to de-couple itself from Pakistan, and the Talbott-Singh dialogue, which began after the 1998 nuclear tests, undoubtedly showed a hitherto unseen level of commitment in the face of what appeared to be slow and at times invisible progress.

The major achievement of the dialogue was to smooth communications between the two countries, and to begin to build an Indian constituency for nuclear arms control (and the Indian government's assurance that the recent Senate vote against ratify-

ing the CTBT will not affect its efforts to strengthen this constituency has been well taken in the US). India has achieved some international recognition of the fact that its security concerns extend beyond South Asia – for example, in maintaining independence from the Chinese security umbrella – but as long as hostilities continue between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, it is going to be difficult for the US, or the international community, to view either country's security independently of the other's.

**T**his does not obviate bilateral military cooperation between the US and India in specific areas; indeed, it would be helpful for both countries' militaries to begin to understand each other, and especially useful for the Indian military to learn more about contemporary strategic thought, not to mention technologies. Indeed, India's comparative naiveté on nuclear technology – especially operational and warning systems – has been the subject of considerable and stringent comment in the US, given India's professed 'doctrine' of minimum deterrence (deterrence itself having never been more than double-speak for an arms race).

At the level of foreign policy, the Indian government has recently begun to deal with the challenges with which it has been confronted in the post Cold War period. On a trip to address the UN General Assembly in New York in September 1999, Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh regretted India's relative and self-imposed isolation in the years immediately following the Cold War. This was the first time that the Ministry of External Affairs had acknowledged India's strangely defeatist stance towards an event her leaders had consistently wished for – the end of the Cold War – and it showed that the Indian government is at last con-

sidering what role the country should play in a post Cold War world.

The task is not an easy one: the years of relative isolation cost India dearly in terms of weakened relations in East and Central Europe, the Middle East and, to a lesser extent, Central Asia. Repairing those relations will in itself take time and concerted effort. Formulating an effective post Cold War foreign policy, which will balance India's needs as a developing country in a neglected Asian region with her long time ideals for a multipolar and just world order, will take more than time and effort: it will take hard thinking and harder bargaining.

At the same time as he regretted India's quietude in the post Cold War years, Jaswant Singh expressed some anxiety as to how the US would view an Indian role in post Cold War international affairs. Given that he did not describe India's policy objectives, or therefore her desired role, his anxiety seemed at first perplexing. On second thought, it became clear that he was asking whether the US would support Indian bids to play a larger role in international affairs, for example, to a seat on the UN Security Council.

**T**he issue of Security Council expansion has been on the UN's agenda since soon after the end of the Cold War, which called the structure of the Security Council into question. The reason it has not been resolved is that the UN is still to debate what would be an appropriate post Cold War structure. In the interim, the permanent five members are torn between whether to expand and how to limit expansion. Unofficially, Germany and Japan have been accepted candidates for expansion for some years, as economic powers; adding India might open questions about whether nuclear and/or economic power are sufficient criteria by which to determine Secu-

rity Council membership, or whether additional criteria are required.

This is a discussion worth having and worth pushing for, but India would then have to push for such a discussion rather than simply lobby for candidacy. Meanwhile, there are other fora to whose membership the US could propose India, and it would be worth the two countries' while to begin an exploration of what these could be. On the economic front there are several possible fora, such as APEC or an expanded version of the G8, and there are several interest groups (apart from the diaspora) in the US who would be willing to lobby for US support for Indian candidacy.

**O**n the peace and security fronts, however, there are few fora other than the UN. ASEAN's Asia-Pacific security forum is one possibility. SAARC would be an obvious forum to develop South Asian peace and security, and were it be so developed it could institute cooperative relations with ASEAN, the OSCE and NATO. However, SAARC's two most powerful members, India and Pakistan, have for typically shortsighted reasons opposed a substantial role for SAARC in either economic or security spheres. This is a point India needs to consider very seriously indeed.

In the post Cold War world, alignment with a superpower is not in itself a guarantee of either status or security (Israel is the only possible exception to this norm, but for obvious reasons, it has to be taken as exceptional rather than exemplary). Successful international relations in the post Cold War world require multilateral or regional associations *plus* a relationship with the US. Australia's role in the East Timor peace keeping force is a case in point. Had India accepted Indonesia's request to put together a peace keeping force for East Timor, the country would have

been much better placed to make its bid for international status.

Objectively, India and the US ought to have many areas where their goals would overlap in international affairs. In an era of ethnic and communal conflict, both countries are committed to pluralist and secular democracy. In practice though, their common interests do not translate easily. American interventionism is viewed suspiciously by India even when in response to humanitarian crises or in support of multiethnic democracy – for example, though the Dayton Peace Agreement was a weak agreement whose results have done little to rebuild Bosnia, it did at least create the option to create a pluralist Bosnian state.

India, which had at the beginning participated in peace keeping in the former Yugoslavia (General Namibar led the UN peace keeping forces in 1992), chose not to join the post-Dayton peace keeping missions (IFOR and SFOR), studiously ignored the Kosovo crisis, and rejected the Indonesian request to lead a peace keeping mission in East Timor. India's reasons for the rejection were worth considering: that the Indian Army had been badly burnt by the Sri Lankan peace keeping mission in the 1980s.

**N**evertheless, one would have hoped that the years of introspection would have produced a deeper political philosophy of the do's and don'ts of peace keeping rather than a retreat from it altogether. India's participation in international peace keeping has dropped from 12,000 troops in the Congo in the 1960s to an upper limit of 500, mostly technical assistance, in the 1990s (the only exception being in Somalia).

For their part, Americans tend to brush away Indian concerns about peace keeping, which if taken on

board could help make peace keeping missions more successful – as, for example, in Somalia, where Indian peace keepers stepped in to ease the standoff between US humanitarian intervention forces and an embittered local populace. Indeed, the Bosnian mission could learn a lot from the Indian Peace Keeping Force experience in Sri Lanka: not least amongst its lessons was that king-making by an occupying force can lead to the isolation of moderates in the median term, making the transition towards peace more rocky.

**O**ne final point on the question of US support for a wider Indian role in post Cold War relations. India appears to have forgotten that it is better to approach such a question from a position of strength rather than weakness. By this we mean not military or economic strength alone, but moral force. Since Independence and during the early decades of the Cold War, India commanded far greater international respect than her actual strength would confer on her, because she was willing to take an ethical position on contentious issues internationally; and indeed, used her relationships to pursue important quiet diplomacy (as when Nehru intervened with the Soviet Union in the late 1950s to protect Hungarian dissidents).

Jaswant Singh's approach, in contrast, can be characterized as hat in hand, while the Ministry of External Affairs' approach can be characterized as purely defensive (if one looks at India's opposition to the International Criminal Court or its votes on the former Yugoslavia in the UN). Together the two lead to the impression that India does not really desire a wider role in international affairs. If this is the case, the Indian government will have to do a lot of explaining domestically, as the Indian populace has

grown up on the assurance that India has a standing in the world.

The most difficult of the three areas of Indo-US relations is the question of India-US-Pakistan relations. As we said at the outset, it was the nuclear tests which locked the two countries together in international – especially US – security concerns. And the root of the problem, as the US and most of the world see it, is Kashmir. In fact, it is not certain that if India and Pakistan arrive at a settlement in Kashmir they will have buried the hatchet altogether. The real unfinished business of Partition is in coming to terms with the partition itself, putting it behind us, and moving on.

**T**his is easier for India than Pakistan, largely because the Pakistani state still seeks its identity in reaction to India. As Pakistani commentator after commentator has said, the just and fruitful Muslim society which was the vision of Pakistan's founders, was never seriously attempted by any of its leaders. To be fair, it is difficult to imagine that a people who had always lived in a multi-ethnic society (however fissiparous) could leap easily into a theocratic mode and combine this with justice, opportunity and choice. Such a task would surely take many generations, and until Pakistan can solve its endemic identity crises India must expect some degree of tension to her West. Nevertheless, reaching a settlement on Kashmir would remove the most intense of Indo-Pakistani tensions, and pave the way for a wider peace process. Can there be a US role in this?

This is a complicated question, because there are so many layers to it. One effect of the tests was that the international community came to the conclusion that the Kashmir conflict had now assumed a nuclear dimension, with levels of threat that neces-

sitated international prevention. US and British pressure was mounted on both India and Pakistan, and its result was to jump start the stalemated peace process between the two countries, which reached a nadir with the Lahore Declaration between Prime Ministers Vajpayee and Sharif.

**K**argil and the military coup brought the peace process to an abrupt halt again, though it is significant that the US acted first to pressurize Pakistan to withdraw from Kargil, and then pushed General Musharraf to de-escalate along the international border. They are now pushing for de-escalation along the Line of Control. Both actions were very welcome to India, and have started a discussion within the country on whether internationalization might not be such a dangerous thing after all. As many Indian commentators point out, the issue has been internationalized already. This statement, however, ignores the fact that, at present, international pressure has been largely limited to tensions between India and Pakistan, and even on this score continues to be largely ineffective.

The Indian government has thus far resisted calls for a resumption of talks with Pakistan, on grounds that this would be tantamount to recognizing the military coup. For his part, General Musharraf has been deafeningly silent on Pakistan's support for the terrorist acts of groups such as the West Punjab-based Lashkar-e-Toiba in Kashmir. The US could certainly play a role in breaking this stalemate by, for example, persuading Pakistan to push the Lashkar and allied groups to declare a cease-fire and withdraw from Kashmir in exchange for safe passage; India's quid pro quo would have to be opening talks with Kashmiri separatist groups such as the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front

and the Hurriyat. It is a pity that neither country is prepared to take these relatively minor steps unilaterally, as each of these steps is demonstrably within the respective country's own self-interest.

Pakistan needs to disband the many militias on its soil, which engage in domestic as well as external disorder. The task is a Herculean one, though it is easier as far as Kashmir is concerned, because simply cutting off aid and arms supplies to the militants would sufficiently debilitate them. India needs to restore democracy in the valley, because the losses it has taken in Kashmir are rapidly becoming intolerable. Kargil cost the country over Rs 20 billion, and Indian troops and policemen are dying every day in the valley. The arrest and continuing imprisonment of Kashmiri leaders is in any case indefensible. There are mounting calls within the Parliament and by civil society groups for talks with all the Kashmiri leaders, and though Kashmir's Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah is resistant, he will come around if the central government pushes for talks.

**A**s the date of President Clinton's visit to India approaches, India can expect mounting pressure on him by US groups to seek a settlement on Kashmir. While pushing Nawaz Sharif and the Pakistani Army to withdraw from Kargil, President Clinton promised to 'take a personal interest' in Kashmir. Given the speed with which the US washed Sharif out of everyone's hair, his commitment might not mean much. But he will certainly be constantly reminded of his promise. It is up to India to decide whether to turn his interest to advantage or not. But wouldn't it be worth asking if his trip could be made to coincide with a militants' cease-fire in Kashmir?

# An Indian century?

T N NINAN

*A casual observer, glancing at India's macro-economic situation, would see little evidence of a nation in the throes of profound change.*

*But look at the micro-economy and an entirely different picture emerges: one of quickening structural transformation reshaping India's business world and markets, and with them the lives of millions of people. The number of milestones passed in the past 12 months shows how far this process has advanced.*

*Infosys Technologies, a software exporter, became the first Indian company to list on a US stock market. It was joined by ICICI, the first Indian financial institution to undergo a US audit, and Satyam Infoway, an Internet service provider.*

*Reliance Petroleum commissioned India's first private sector oil refinery, one of the biggest in the world. Essar Steel became the first Indian company to default on an international debt issue. Private sector fund managers overtook Unit Trust of India, the public sector fund manager, in terms of sales for the first time.*

*The number of acquisitions hit an all-time high. Zee Telefilms, a media company, bought out joint venture partner Star Television in India's biggest media deal. Tata Tea tabled a record bid for a foreign company, Tetley Tea. Lafarge, the French company, became the first multinational to enter India's cement industry.*

*Ranbaxy and Dr Reddy's Laboratories led India's pharmaceutical industry into a new era, when they licensed the first products of their research to foreign companies. And software exports hit a new record, while the sector's market capitalisation crossed Rs 100,000 crore: the highest valuation ever placed on an Indian industry.*

*The rapidity and extent of change is captured on India's stock markets,*

*where the list of India's top private sector companies by market capitalisation reveals the churning that has taken place. An entire generation of family-owned industrial conglomerates has sunk into decline, while new investor-friendly businesses in sunrise sectors have burst into prominence.*

*Industrial turmoil has shattered the monopoly on commercial wealth held by the great business dynasties in Mumbai and Calcutta. Self-made entrepreneurs now pack the list of India's richest men: Azim Premji of Wipro, N R. Narayana Murthy of Infosys Technologies, Subhash Chandra of Zee Telefilms, Shiv Nadar of NIIT, Anji Reddy of Dr Reddy's and Dhirubhai Ambani of Reliance Industries.*

*Ratan Tata of Tata Sons and Kumaramangalam Birla of Aditya Birla, two of India's two great industrial houses, are fighting to adapt their empires to competitive markets. Many lesser dynasties are already at the brink of commercial extinction.*

*Krishna Guha in Financial Times*

A CENTURY ago, the United States emerged as the world's most powerful economy. Riding on the back of the boom in sunrise sectors like railroads, steel and oil, the US economy grew by a sustained annual average of 6 per cent, from about 1870 to 1900, and emerged a global superpower. The 20th century dawned as the American century, and stayed that way.

The hundred years or so before 1870 had been a British century, starting with the industrial revolution: steam power, the textile revolution, steel making, and later railroads. For a quarter of a millennium before that, the Renaissance had spread knowledge and innovation across Europe

Most of these seminal changes passed India by, except that it experienced the backwash through colonialism. At the start of the Renaissance, Babar was descending on India. The Mughals rose in stature, wealth and fame, but was there an Indian century at any stage in the half-millennium since?

**T**he most likely period is the 17th century – which is before the depredations of colonialism, and at the height of the splendour of Shah Jahan. India was then the land of fortune and fantasy, of fabled wealth and Mecca-like status for European traders in search of spices and fine cloth. As Bernier noted, ‘Gold and silver, after circulating in every other quarter of the globe, came at length to be swallowed up...in Hindustan.’ Abraham Eraly says in *The Lives and Times of the Great Mughals* that the revenue of the king of England at the end of the 17th century was only about one-seventeenth of Akbar’s revenue. Indeed, India’s share of world GDP then was about one-fourth – only marginally less than that of Europe, and about the same as China’s.

But, and this is the more relevant point, these great riches had little impact on the lives of ordinary people. In Shah Jahan’s time, 61.5 per cent of the total revenue of 220 million rupees was arrogated by just 655 individuals. And the revenue was between a third and half of national income. In other words, about a quarter of national income went to 655 people, out of a total population of 120 million.

Whether it was the Mughal empire, or the Vijaynagar empire earlier, or any other period, great riches accumulated at the top while the majority lived in abject poverty, ignorance and disease. Just one famine in Shah Jahan’s time killed three million people in the Deccan and Gujarat; the

equivalent percentage of the population today would be 25 million people, or the entire population of Punjab. And famines were not rare occurrences: another two million died, for instance, during a famine in Aurangzeb’s reign. That’s the equivalent of the population of Haryana, in today’s terms. By way of famine relief, Shah Jahan spent sums equal to a tenth of Mumtaz Mahal’s annual pin money. As Eraly says, the people were poor, the country was poor, only the emperor and the amirs were rich. So a Mughal century, perhaps, but not an Indian one.

**B**ut in many ways at the time, the sun at least shone on India. It set in the 19th century. Around 1815, when Napoleon was meeting his Waterloo, if the economic historians are to be believed, India accounted for about a sixth of global industrial production. By the end of the century, this was down to about one-fortieth or less. Colonialism had taken its toll, and continued to do so. In the first half of the 20th century, GDP was virtually stagnant. There was no growth, even as the population explosion was set off around 1920.

A wasted half-millennium then. But what if we go further back in time, to what India was like 1000 years ago? What was it like in the country, at the end of the last millennium? Here’s the most appropriate description, from the Oxford historian Felipe Fernandez-Armesto’s acclaimed *Millennium: A History of our Last Thousand Years*. ‘India has been the Cinderella civilisation of our millennium: beautiful, gifted, destined for greatness, but relegated to the backstairs by those domineering sisters from Islam and Christendom. A history of the first millennium of our era would have to give India enormous weight: the subcontinent housed a single civilisation, characterised by elements of common

culture, coterminous with its geographical limits; the achievements it produced in art, science, literature and philosophy were exported, with a moulding impact, to China and Islam; and it was a civilisation in expansion, creating its own colonial New World in south-east Asia.

‘With bewildering suddenness, at about the turn of the millennium, the inspiration seemed to dry up, the vision to turn inward, and the coherence to dissolve. Whereas earlier generations of Muslim scholars had looked to India with eager reverence, Al-Beruni, turning in the 1020s to glean further learning from the same source, was disappointed by what he saw. Hindu science, he found, “presumed on the ignorance of the people”. Political dissolution accompanied the cultural decline. The large states which had filled most of the subcontinent in uneasy equilibrium since the early ninth century collapsed under the strain of mutual emulation and the impact of invaders and insurgents. The rich temples of northern India became the prey of opportunistic raiders from Afghanistan.’

**T**he smash and grab raiders were followed by those seeking settled conquest. And India’s long night began. When power began to shift from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, half a millennium ago, India was a fabled land but with riches at the top for the mostly alien ruling class. It was a flawed, brittle society without inner structural strength, and collapse was perhaps inevitable in the face of the colonial challenge. Now, another half a millennium later, as power begins to shift across oceans yet again (to the Pacific, this time), India is once more the Cinderella-civilisation: full of promise, but coming off second best in comparison with more alluring sisters even among the so-called emerg-



ing markets (China is the most obvious example).

It need not be that way. In some senses, the American century has been a century of preparation for India. The first five decades saw the successful fight for freedom. The next three saw muddled thinking in a society grappling with illiteracy (8 per cent female literacy at the time of Independence), poor life expectancy (32 years, at Independence), rapid population growth (2.2 per cent annually) and poor capital accumulation (10 per cent savings rate at the start of the first five year plan). All this plus Fabian socialism, masquerading increasingly as statism, kept growth rates down to 3.5 per cent for three decades. It would have been unreasonable to expect Tiger performance, given all the constraints. But some foundations were laid, including in agriculture.

**T**he next two decades have seen a change of gear: growth has averaged 5.5 per cent. More important, the numbers below the poverty line have dropped from more than half of the population to about a third; literacy and life expectancy have climbed; the population growth rate has dropped to 1.6 per cent. By a finance ministry calculation, India has already been the sixth fastest growing economy over the past two decades.

Over the half-century as a whole, per capita income has grown at 2 per cent a year. Now there is likely to be another gear shift: per capita income can grow 5 per cent annually (6.5 per cent GDP growth, and 1.5 per cent population growth). The basis for these numbers is that the investment rate in the economy is now around 28 per cent. At an incremental capital-output ratio (or ICOR) of about 4, this should be able to sustain an annual GDP growth rate of 7 per cent. If you factor in infrastructural constraints,

and assume some loss of economic activity on that account, it is reasonable to conclude that the likely growth rate will be 6.5 per cent.

The significance of per capita income growing annually by 5 per cent should not be underestimated; because, what it means is that the absolute increase in income levels over the next decade will match that achieved in the last five decades.

**Y**et, if the headlines have ignored India, it is because the bridesmaid does not get mention in the presence of the bride. The bride is China, of course. Nothing is happening in India compared to the scale of development taking place even today in China: roads, buildings, telecommunications, airports, hotels, trade, investment. By any yardstick, China is doing more than twice as much as India is in terms of infrastructure development; China's foreign trade is more than four times India's. It attracts many times more foreign investment than India does. It is simply in another league.

But if the United States became the most powerful economy in the world following three decades of 6 per cent annual growth, and if China has already arrived as a counterpoise to the US, following two decades of 8 per cent growth, how much would it take for India to set off an economic earthquake?

The answer is that if India can indeed accelerate to 6.5 per cent growth, and sustain that for a decade or two, the plate tectonics of global economic power will certainly shift. Consider some possibilities.

India's full-fledged consuming class could multiply rapidly in size, in little more than a decade, if per capita income were to increase at 5 per cent annually. The National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) estimates that there were 4.5 million

households in the high-income category (those buying cars, white goods, brown goods, et al), back in 1994-95. This is expected to grow to 13.2 million households in another two years, and then nearly double to 23.2 million in another five years, i.e. 2006-07. This means a full-fledged middle class of over 100 million people, compared to barely 20 million five years ago.

Think of the demand this would set off for everything from cars to houses, and for the goods to put into those houses – and the scale at which consumer goods are produced today will soon look puny.

One income category lower, among the middle classes, the numbers will climb from 70 million households to 140 million, between 1994-95 and 2006-07. That's 700 million people consuming soaps, toothpastes, shoes, clothing, and so on, not to speak of the more basic consumer durables. What this also means is that the low-income category shrinks in size, from 86 million households to 36 million. These numbers spell a consumption explosion round the corner. And that means rapid growth.

**C**onsider, then, the possibility that the overwhelming majority of the population may be literate in a decade or so from now. Across the world, a dramatic increase in literacy has allowed people to get off the land, to seek a better life in towns and cities. The United States, for instance, was a country of rural inhabitants at the time of its civil war, in 1860. One of the great transitions of the 20th century, which passed India by, was the dramatic decline in the peasantry, i.e. people living off the land. Among all the countries in the world today, perhaps India and China stand out as having hundreds of millions of people still living on the land.

Yet, India already has the largest urban population in the world, with some two dozen cities having a population of at least a million. But what if the urban population were to double in size in little more than a decade, even as income levels rise faster than ever before? The explosion in demand for housing, transport and entertainment would be seismic in scale.

**W**hat could fuel and sustain this kind of growth? One answer is the knowledge industry. India missed the industrial revolution for a couple of centuries, and was a late bloomer in the agricultural sweepstakes. Even today, Indian agriculture is held back by a series of counter-productive policies that deny Indian farmers the opportunity to access world markets.

But in the knowledge business, India finds that it has innate competitive advantages: knowledge of English; easy mastery of mathematics; a broad base of sound educational institutions, including centres of excellence; a vast population that can feed a burgeoning industry with graduate fodder on a scale that keeps wage costs competitive; an entrepreneurial instinct that will now be nurtured by a nascent venture capital industry; linkages with success stories in silicon valley; and fire in the belly, following the saturation media coverage of the early success stories. Role models can be a powerful engine of growth. And so, ten years from now, software exports alone could be equal to the country's total exports today.

Software can be India's oil.

What could be India's banana peel? The short answer is the government. Any and everything that the government touches is a disaster story. Over-extended and under-performing, it will neither do its job properly nor get out of the way. It is, and has been for some time, the biggest parasite on

the system. Whether it is preventing airport deaths because of defective escalators, or controlling organised crime in the cities, or ensuring attendance and teaching in government schools, or preventing wholesale leakage of funds and materials meant for anti-poverty programmes, or ensuring the minimum sanitation in hospitals, or keeping MiG fighter-aircraft from crashing every fortnight, or maintaining a proper statistical system so that the economy can be tracked accurately, or controlling the fiscal deficit, or...it's a long list of abject failures. Many of these, including the deficit, are system threatening and known to be so; but the system seems unable to get to grips with solutions; in many areas, no one is even trying.

**I**n the economic sphere, the government borrows at 12 per cent and invests to get a return of 2 per cent. Because the government is borrowing at 12 per cent, no one can borrow at less; so it crowds out productive investment. Policy-making in almost every infrastructure sector is still a mess, nearly a decade after attention first focused on this. Corruption has become endemic (the father of the dead child at Delhi airport had to pay a Rs 3000 bribe to get the post mortem report).

But socially, stratification is becoming less rigid as the backward groups get more assertive. Women are still to win substantive emancipation, but their energies too are being released now in a way that was not there before (primarily through the spread of education, and their joining the workforce in greater numbers in the urban centres). Competition among the states will intensify, creating a virtuous cycle, as the lead taken by a couple of young chief ministers is followed up by others. Governments will also perhaps become more responsive and closer to the people, as

the tools of the information age are used to engineer a more open government: land records from a computer kiosk, instead of bribing the patwari, to take one instance. Finally, the structural composition of the population will change. Today, 40 per cent of the population is under 20 years of age, and predominantly dependent and unproductive. As the birth rate declines further, the percentage of the population that is in the productive age bracket will increase.

These underlying changes in society are at least as significant as striking oil. Their combined impact within the over-all framework of an open, democratic and increasingly participative system, can be such as to make it possible for India to challenge what otherwise promises to be Chinese dominance of Asia. Too many people are still navel-gazing for this to have even entered the national consciousness.

**A**lso, if Mughal society was structurally weak because of skewed reward systems, and if colonial India was bleeding to benefit an alien master, contemporary India faces some stern tests in nation-building. Kashmir is the most obvious example. The tension between secularism and majoritarianism is another.

But having admitted all this, it is hard to see why India should not be able to achieve 6.5 per cent annual GDP growth in the next decade, and even more in the decade to follow. It is equally hard to see how these growth rates, sustained over a long period, will not substantially abolish the scourge of absolute poverty from a land which has been a by-word for such poverty for centuries. It isn't taking a great risk, therefore, to forecast that the next couple of decades should certainly belong to India. After that, the century?

# A speculative gaze

RAKESH MOHAN

WE have come a long way since Independence (see Table 1). 1947 marked a major departure from almost a thousand years of political, economic and social subjugation. The country was then literally in darkness. Compared with today's 85,000 mw of installed power generation capacity, the total installed capacity in 1947 was 1362 mw. The life expectancy at birth was 32 and overall literacy was 17%. By 1991 life expectancy had increased to 60 and literacy to 52%.

The evidence, though not yet conclusive, suggests that literacy rates have finally begun to accelerate in North India as well and that the overall level of literacy may have risen to about 60% now. Official poverty estimates hovered around 50% in the first three decades after Independence but have declined since to about 35%. The 1960s witnessed a serious bout of food insecurity but measures taken since then have resulted in almost 30 years of relatively comfortable food self-sufficiency.

Although most of us are justifiably disappointed at the progress made by India since Independence, we must recognise the positive achievements that have been accomplished. After a century or more of zero economic growth, the first three decades of the post-Independence period laid the foundation for sustained economic growth of a kind not seen in our recorded history. But this growth, at less than 1.5% annual growth in per capita income and 3.5% in national income was clearly inadequate to make any dent in the high poverty levels prevalent in the country. However, the foundations for modern economic growth were well laid and

we saw significant acceleration in the 1980s and 1990s. The higher annual growth of per capita income at about 3.5% achieved in the 1980s became palpable and major poverty ratios fell significantly.

The progress achieved in the 1980s should have taught us the lesson that higher economic growth must be the key objective of economic policy, and that it is only higher economic growth that can reduce poverty and provide sustainable economic security. No distribution can take place when there is nothing to distribute.

It is useful to look at the long-term decline of both China and India. India began its decline as an economic power from the early part of the 18th century, while China's decline perhaps began in the early part of the 19th century (see tables 2a and 2b). It would appear that the India accounted for about 16% of world income in the early 1800s whereas China was about double that at 32%. The share of both these countries declined over the next century and a half and fell to about 4% for India and 5% for China by 1950. Correspondingly, it was Europe and the United States that gained substantially over this period.

India's improved economic performance since the early 1980s has substantially increased its share of world income from about 3.4% in the late 1970s to about 4.6% now. However, during this period Chinese superior economic performance doubled its share of about 5% in the late 1970s to about 11% now. This has been achieved by a major step up in investment and economic efficiency brought in through the active implementation of economic reforms throughout this

TABLE 1

Progress Since Independence: Key Indicators				
Year	Poverty (per cent)	Literacy (per cent)	Life Expectancy (years)	Power Capacity (MW)
1951	45	17	32	1,362
1961	45	31	45	4,653
1971	52	38	50	14,709
1981	43	44	55	30,214
1991	35	52	60	85,000

period. Thus the achievement of long term and sustainable acceleration in Indian economic growth over the next 10 to 20 years requires substantial enhancement of overall investment levels and improvement in economic efficiency.

The countries which have achieved high annual growth in excess of 6% in per capita income in the last three decades have done so through significant increases in their gross investment rates (see table 3). The achievement of per capita income growth of 6% in India over the next 10 years will require a GNP growth rate of over 7.5% per annum. Even if this were achieved, Indian per capita income in the year 2010 would not exceed what the per capita income of countries such as Thailand was before 1985. In other words, even if we are able to achieve a significant step up in our economic growth we will still be substantially behind most East Asian countries.

As may be seen from table 3, all countries which have succeeded in stepping up their growth rates to about 6% were able to do so by substantial increases in gross domestic capital formation in excess of 30% of GDP. The current Indian investment ratio is hovering around 25% to 27%. This needs to be stepped up to more than 30% within the next few years. A primary driver of higher economic growth is investment in infrastructure. The India Infrastructure Report had projected that the achievement of GDP growth of over 7% will require an increase in investment in infrastruc-

ture from the prevalent levels of about 5 to 5.5 of GDP in the mid-1990s to about 8% of GDP by 2005-06.

It had concluded that it would not be possible to achieve this unless the public sector kept up its existing rate of investment in infrastructure amounting to about 4.5% to 5% of GDP, while increasing private sector investment in infrastructure substantially to account for the balance. Private investment in infrastructure would have to increase from about 0.5 to 1% of GDP in the mid-1990s to 2.5% to 3% of GDP by about 2005. Thus, the achievement of higher growth requires the maintenance of public investment in infrastructure facilities at a high level while policies are changed to facilitate increasing levels of private investment.

The main impediment to the achievement of this scenario is the deteriorating fiscal situation of both the central and state governments in India. The government's ability to invest has been declining continuously since the late 1980s because of its deteriorating fiscal position (see table 4). What is encouraging, of course, is the increase in private corporate sector investment levels subsequent to the 1991 reforms. The reforms have therefore succeeded in encouraging higher levels of private investment as envisaged. But further increases are constrained by declining public investment levels.

India adopted an economic policy based on self-sufficiency and trade protection in the context of a planned economy from the immediate period after Independence in the 1950s. This policy remained relatively unchanged until the late 1970s. The first glimmer of change began in the 1980s with some liberalisation of the tight industrial regulatory system, some liberalisation of imports and more focused export promotion. This was also accompanied by a stepped

TABLE 2a

Share of World GDP, 1700-1995 (per cent)						
	1700	1820	1890	1952	1978	1995
China	23.1	32.4	13.2	5.2	5.0	10.9
India	22.6	15.7	11.0	3.8	3.4	4.6
Japan	4.5	3.0	2.5	3.4	7.7	8.4
Europe	23.3	26.6	40.3	29.7	27.9	23.8
United States	0.0	1.8	13.8	28.4	21.8	20.9
USSR/Russia	3.2	4.8	6.3	8.7	9.2	2.2

TABLE 2b

Rates of Growth of World GDP, 1700-1995 (annual average compound growth rates)				
	1700-1820	1820-1952	1952-1978	1978-1995
China	0.85	0.22	4.40	7.49
India	0.26	0.54	4.02	4.63
Japan	0.21	1.74	7.85	3.21
Europe	0.68	1.71	4.27	1.74
United States	2.57	3.78	3.46	2.47
USSR/Russia	0.86	2.08	4.75	-5.56
World	0.57	1.62	4.52	2.70

Source: Angus Maddison, *Chinese Economic Performance in the Long Run*. Paris: OECD, 1998

up public investment programme focused on enhancing the infrastructure facilities in the country.

These measures seemed to have broken the low growth trajectory of the Indian economy and increased the rate of GNP growth to almost 5.5% per year for the 1980s as a whole. However, this growth was bought to a certain extent by widening fiscal deficits incurred to finance the higher public investment programme. The resulting higher growth also widened the current account deficit as imports grew faster than the exports. Thus, although the Indian economy achieved a higher growth path in the 1980s, it ran into a serious economic crisis in 1991.

It was against this background that the economic reforms were initiated in 1991. We have, accordingly, gone through a wide ranging reform process covering the areas of macro economic and fiscal stabilisation, industrial policy, trade policy, exchange rate determination, public sector policy, financial sector policy, capital markets and agriculture. The effort has been to eliminate existing controls in all areas which had distorted resource allocation and inhibited entrepreneurship. It was thought that these measures would nudge the economy towards the attainment of even higher productivity and efficiency.

The results so far have been mixed. After an initial downturn in 1991-92 the economy recovered and attained a growth rate in excess of 7.5% per year between 1993-96. The external balance has been restored, inflation is at a record low, banks are subject to new prudential discipline, and the capital market has become deeper and more vibrant. But the fiscal deficit has remained stubbornly high at about 6% of GDP after an initial adjustment. After three years of buoyant growth in 1993-96 the economy

has experienced a slow-down and has now come back to the kind of growth path achieved in the 1980s.

Although a great deal of economic reform has taken place in the 1990s, much remains to be done. In many areas reform has been halfhearted and in others it has not really begun. Fiscal adjustment has been very partial and the fiscal situation in both the centre and the states is now becoming unsustainable. Consequently, public investment has fallen sharply, which is also constraining the higher growth feasible in the private corporate sector.

Industrial de-regulation has been quite comprehensive except in the case of small-scale industry. More than 800 items continued to be reserved for production in the small-scale sector. Among the objectives of economic reforms was an acceleration in the generation of industrial and other employment. The items reserved for the small-scale sector are typically those which are easy to manufacture and are labour intensive. This measure may have been useful when it was put in place to encourage the entry of new entrepreneurs into the industrial sector. It has now become obsolete and acts as a brake on the expansion of the many small-scale units that were set up in the last three decades.

Moreover, it also inhibits the growth of industrial employment which would otherwise takes place if such growth impediments did not exist. Many of the items such as clothing, shoes, plastic goods, sports goods, toys and the like are exactly those in which India would be extremely competitive globally. The restrictions on investment level in these items does not allow for quality and technology

upgradation on a consistent basis, so essential for a continued and sustainable expansion in exports.

The result is that India is unable to experience sustained long term export growth, so vital for attaining an overall higher growth path. We experience short bursts of rapid export growth whenever significant real devaluation enhances our price based low end competitiveness. Such growth peters out as soon as this advantage is exhausted.

Similarly, reforms in other areas have been half-hearted. Although a great deal of discussion has taken place in the last four years or so over private investment in infrastructure, the economic and regulatory conditions in place have not been conducive to significant increase in private investment in infrastructure. Reforms in the financial sector were also begun with a great deal of enthusiasm with the entry of a handful of private banks and some expansion of foreign banks along with the promulgation of new prudential requirements and interest rate deregulation. These initial reforms have not continued and the financial sector has therefore some distance to go before it becomes as efficient as it is in other countries.

The greatest failure of Indian economic policy has been in the area

TABLE 3

Gross Investment Rates in Current Prices: Selected Countries (1952-1994)			
Country	Gross Investment/GDP (per cent)		
	1952-57	1958-77	1978-94
India	12.0	16.4	23.3*
China	23.2	28.0	34.2
Japan	26.9	34.3	30.3
Korea	NA	23.3**	32.5
Taiwan	15.2	24.4	25.9
France	18.8	25.2	21.0
Germany	23.4	25.2	20.6
United Kingdom	15.3	18.7	17.4
United States	19.0	18.5	18.7

Source: Angus Maddison, *Chinese Economic Performance in the Long Run* Paris: OECD, 1998, <sup>†</sup> 1978-91, <sup>\*\*</sup> 1960-77

TABLE 4

Declining Public Investment  
Gross Capital Formation (per cent of GDP)

Period	Total	Private Corporate Sector	Public Sector
1980-85	21.9	4.3	10.2
1985-90	23.7	4.5	10.5
1990-95	23.7	6.0	9.1
1995-98	24.0	8.3	7.0

Source: Government of India, *Economic Survey* (various issues).

of human development. As the state gave greater attention to the production of goods and services in the public sector, areas such as education and health never received the attention that they should have. Thus, though significant improvements have taken place in these areas since Independence, our achievements are still quite a distance away from those in East Asian countries. Investment in human development would require much greater spending for education and health by both the public and private sectors and the assurance of a minimum level of nutrition to all citizens of the country.

Such an increase in expenditure can only be achieved if the government can reduce or eliminate unnecessary subsidies and re-allocate expenditure directly to such social necessities. Detailed calculations on the returns to public sector investments suggests that the average returns at present are not very different from zero. The cost of current borrowing is in the region of 10-12%. This then is the extent of inefficiency in the allocation of investible resources available with the government at present. Thus, an improvement in public sector functioning is a key requirement for both achieving higher growth in the economy and for finding the resources necessary for higher investment in social services.

The healthy growth achieved by the economy in the 1980s and 1990s has not only reduced poverty signifi-

cantly but also expanded the market for goods very substantially. The NCAER has conducted annual household surveys since 1985-86, covering a sample of about 300,000 households to provide data on profiles of consumers for a variety of consumer goods, both durables and non durables. These

surveys also provide relatively detailed information on the income distribution of households in both urban and rural areas.

We have been able to track the movement of households across income groups for almost 15 years. In examining these data we attempted to understand the expansion of the market as also to project how this expansion will take place over the next decade or so. The results are quite startling. If we believe that the way the economy has gone in the past 20 years has been healthy and that market expansion has been very large, the prospects for the future are quite staggering.

For convenience, we have classified all households into five income classes: low, low middle, middle, upper middle and high. The cut-off points for each income class is adjusted for inflation so as to make income groups comparable over time. The high income group comprises households who have income above Rs 110,000 per year at 1995-96 prices. The low income households are those with income less than Rs 25,000 per year. Although it is likely that the observed income is understated significantly, the comparisons over time are valid since the sampling is done on the same basis every year.

The data show that low income households declined from about 65% in 1985-86 to about 54% in 1994-95; the proportion of the high income households increased from about

1.1% in 1985-86 to 2.9% in 1994-95. During this period the GDP grew at an average rate of about 5 to 5.5%. We, therefore, observed that the change between the mid-1980s to mid-1990s was significant but slow.

What is of great interest is the acceleration in this change that is expected over the next decade or so if GDP grows at about 6.5% plus during this period. The proportion of low income households is projected to decline sharply from the 54% in 1994-95 to less than 15% by 2010. In fact, in urban areas they would become negligible at 2% or less. The growth in high income households is then more than dramatic from 2.9% in 1994-95 to more than 15% by 2010. In terms of actual magnitude the number of low income households would fall from about 85 million in 1994-95 to 25 million by 2010. Similarly, high income households will increase from 4.6 million in 1994-95 to almost 30 million by 2010. These are indeed dramatic changes that are expected over the next decade if the economy can actually grow at over 6.5 % per year.

The striking conclusion is that there is a possibility of poverty being eliminated in India within our lifetimes.

**T**he decline of low income households from 65% in 1985-86 to less than 15% by 2010 means that non savings households and non-consuming households will decline precipitously and there will be huge accretions to low, middle, and upper middle income households who will also save and consume more and more.

As a consequence of such income changes the market for goods will expand massively. For example, if the demand for two wheelers in the late 1990s is between 3 and 4 million per year, this may well grow to 7-10 million by 2010. The number of cars

sold per year has already increased from about 30,000 a year in the early 1980s to more than half a million now. This may also expand by a factor of four over the next decade. Similarly, if the number of refrigerators sold is about 2.5 million per year these will increase to more than 6 million by 2010. Wristwatches have already achieved the penetration rate of more than one watch per household in the country. By the end of the next decade there could well be almost two watches per household.

**S**uch an expansion of consumer demand will necessitate a corresponding increase in manufacturing investment, infrastructure investment and expansion of trade. Each of these elements of economic expansion contributes to a virtuous circle of higher consumption, higher investment, higher income growth, higher consumption and higher investment. This is the kind of rapid change process that East and South East Asian countries have traversed over the past 30 years; India is now poised to make a similar jump into the future.

Such income growth brings about changes in food habits and therefore in food production. The share of cereals in food expenditure of households has fallen sharply since the early 1970s in both rural and urban areas. Fruits, vegetables, milk, processed foods, poultry, meat and fish have all increased their share in peoples' diets. We can also expect significant changes in clothing patterns and corresponding clothing production. There will also be a massive increase in the demand for what may be called modern housing which will again lead to significant changes in the production pattern of housing and of building materials. With the increase in modern housing there will be further expansion in the demand for all the

goods which fill up kitchens, bathrooms, and bedrooms of peoples homes.

**A**long with such changes in demand and production there will also be corresponding changes in the transportation and distribution of goods. As the volume of retail markets of consumer goods expands there will have to be a transformation in the pattern of retailing. The movement of massive volumes of goods will lead to the kind of distribution change though as has already taken place in Asian countries. The cultural attachment to small stores with personalized services will become a feature of the past and we will see an increasing number of large modern departmental stores and super markets in most big cities. For example, it is estimated that almost half of all grocery sales in Thailand are now made from stores which may be described as having modern retail trade structures. This proportion was zero as late as 1980s, just as it is in India now.

If such changes take place, the urban form will also undergo corresponding change. As the urban consumers become more hurried in their shopping habits they will demand goods of consistent quality at low prices while expending a minimum of transaction costs. Branding will become even more important than it is today. However, looking at the Indian income levels and distribution today and in the foreseeable future, manufacturers will need to cater appropriately to each market segment. Even by the year 2010 almost two-thirds of households will be in the low to upper middle income ranges demanding goods at low prices but of consistent quality. The current patterns of new market entrants catering only to the rich will not have as much success as those who cater to the mass market.

With the massive increase expected in the volume of goods that will need to be moved, expected expansion in trade, increase in personalised vehicles, and the overall increase in transportation demand, major problems will be encountered unless there is a corresponding expansion of all elements of infrastructure services – roads, railways, ports, airports, power, telecom and the like. The India Infrastructure Report had estimated that investment in such activities amounted to about 5.5% of GDP in the mid-1990s.

To cope with the kind of growth mentioned, it estimated that such investment would have to increase to almost 8% of GDP by 2006 or so. As it happens, the increase in investment that had been expected by the end of the current decade have not fructified. Thus, if the kind of economic vision that has been sketched above is to become a reality, there would have to be even faster growth in all aspects of infrastructure investment in the coming decade, in both the public and private sectors.

**W**e have already witnessed relatively rapid urbanisation over the last 2-3 decades. It is expected that the urbanisation level is likely to be around 30% by the year 2001, with the urban population increasing to about 300 million. We already have more than 300 cities with more than 100,000 population and 23 cities with more than 1 million population. As the pressure on housing increases and people become more mobile, we will also observe pressures mounting on the social front and possibly a breakdown of the familiar joint family system.

Second, although we have not done as well as many other countries in health, the life expectancy in India has increased from less than 32 at the time of Independence to about 62

now. At medium and higher income levels, people are living to higher and higher ages into their '80s and even '90s. With this increase in longevity and pressures on housing, it is becoming more difficult for parents to stay with and be looked after by their children. We can, therefore, expect an increase in demand for social security instruments which provide adequate resources for people in their old age to live reasonably comfortably and with dignity. This demand will only intensify in the future.

**I**t is imperative therefore that the financial sector be opened up to provide more opportunities for households to save in secure insurance and pension funds instruments in order to ensure their future. We would then complete another virtuous circle of high economic growth, high savings, high investment, high infrastructure investment, and high economic growth. The opening up of insurance and other segments of the financial sector is crucial for providing a social safety net for all our citizens while at the same time providing a mechanism for the funding of new infrastructure entities that are likely to come up in both public and private sectors. It is mainly institutional investors who can be expected to have the capability of assessing the credit quality of the different infrastructure entities, be they private companies, public sector companies, state governments or local governments.

Almost all infrastructure services have in the past been provided by the public sector. The pattern and organisation of the provisions of such infrastructure services has been done in such a way that the public has got used to not paying the economic charges for these services. This includes key services such as power, water supply, irrigation, and transport

among others. The argument for not charging appropriate user charges is essentially been on the basis of the inability of poor to pay for such services. This argument has little basis in fact since most such services are essentially consumed by the better off sections of society.

**T**he key issue which is vital for the sustainability of the kind of economic growth sketched above is the need for a major campaign to bring up the levy of user charges to economic levels. Infrastructure entities in both public and private sectors would then be able to get adequate returns for their investments. At present, both the central and all state governments are facing severe fiscal pressure because of the many hidden subsidies that have got embedded in the system. The fiscal balance of both the central and state governments would improve dramatically if user charges are imposed appropriately for all public services. It is only then that we would be able to invest adequately in the provision of such infrastructure services which are essential both for economic growth and for social justice.

There are two kinds of geographical divisions that are becoming apparent in the country. In general, the western part of the country has greater economic dynamism than the eastern part. Second, the southern, non-Hindi speaking states are showing much larger improvements in human development indices than the northern Hindi speaking ones. If current trends continue it is likely that the economic distance between the northern and the eastern states on the one side and the western and southern states on the other will increase significantly.

The key issue for the next decade is for the country to find practical ways in which the problems of these northern and eastern states can be

addressed adequately and particularly in the sectors of health, education and nutrition. There would have to be some kind of special package for these states in order to help them begin to catch up with the better-off states. However, this is not merely a question of throwing resources. The problems are too complex to be dealt with merely through an improvement in resource allocation to the states. These issues will pose a challenge to the federal structure of the country and great political and social skills will be demanded of the leadership.

**T**he decade of 1990s has been dominated by economic policy attempting to liberate the private sector from interference by the government. The objective has been to allow for restructuring and re-allocation of resources within the private sector, and from the public sector to the private sector in order to achieve higher levels of efficiency and productivity. During this period, however, there has been little attempt to improve the workings of the government and of the associated public sector.

The economic reforms in the next decade would have to focus especially on making government more effective, efficient, productive and responsive to the needs of citizens as they become increasingly more vocal. This will involve massive privatisation of public sector entities at both the central and state levels in areas where the private sector is competent to take over such enterprises. Liberation from running such enterprises will enable the government to focus on those core areas such as law and order, health services, education services and essential infrastructure which the government and public sector alone can provide. This is the real challenge for the next decade.



# Values first

At 53, **N.R. Narayana Murthy**, chairman and CEO, Infosys Technologies (1998-99 sales: Rs 513 crore), heads India's most successful Silicon Valley style start-up. Established in 1981 by seven professionals who pooled in their savings of Rs 10,000 (borrowed from their wives), Infosys has set all kinds of records. It was the first company to institute a company-wide, performance based Employee Stock Option Plan that cut right across the hierarchy. This year, it was the first India-registered company to list on an American stock exchange (Nasdaq). On measures of transparency and corporate governance, Infosys is the epitome of the upright corporate citizen.

To Murthy goes the credit for first having the vision to see the opportunity in software, pick the right team and more significantly keep it together. The Infosys success is striking since all of its founders come from middle class backgrounds, had no backing of any business house but simply leveraged their brainpower and sweat equity. This is a model for the new generation of Indian enterprises in the coming millennium.

The fifth born of eight children, Murthy's father was a modest school teacher in Mysore who could not afford to send his son to IIT. Today, his 7.7% stake in Infosys makes Murthy a very wealthy man, with an estimated networth of Rs 2,500 crore. Yet he continues to cling to his roots, staying in a house in the middle class area of Jayanagar in Bangalore with his engineer wife Sudha and their two children, Akshata and Rohan. He was interviewed by **Naazneen Karmali** in Bangalore.

*What made you initially choose engineering as a career?*

My uncle was a civil servant and my father was very keen that I take that up as a career but somehow it didn't appeal to me. Those were the days when engineering was considered the in thing along with medicine. People didn't think that being an economist or a social scientist could be a productive career.

I had got admission to the IIT by passing the entrance exam with a fairly high rank and a scholarship. But the scholarship was to be disbursed at the end

of the year. I remember talking to my father who said that there was no way he could afford to pay since he was earning Rs 250 per month. He said: If you're smart you can go to any college and be able to do something worthwhile. So I joined the local engineering college.

*Did you have any role models who inspired you in your career?*

Those days our role models were our teachers, both in school and university. They taught us to be inquisitive and articulate. You have to imagine a lower middle class family in a district headquarters in the '60s. My father used to tell us about the importance of putting public good before private good; mother would talk about sacrifice and truth. Beyond the basic values of life they didn't discuss too much about our careers.

My dream was to become a junior engineer in a hydroelectric power plant, Nehru's temples of modern India. What appealed to me was that they were non-polluting and set in pristine surroundings. Also, being an electrical engineer, there was this macho thing about building a big generator. But as a top-ranking student, people advised me to do my masters. It was not easy for people like us from a certain section of society that was considered already advantaged to get a job in Karnataka because of the reservation system and so I postponed the career decision for two years by doing my masters.

*So you finally made it to IIT; what was that experience like?*

IIT Kanpur was in its halcyon days. We had so many young professors who had done their Ph.Ds in the US and had come back to India. They were all in their 20s and 30s and full of energy and optimism. Also, under the Kanpur Indo-American programme, IIT had links with eight American universities like MIT, Berkeley, Purdue. What that meant was that when MIT got an IBM computer they sent one to Kanpur. We were introduced to computers – that wonder machine – and I was hooked.

*What prompted you to opt for the unconventional job offer from IIM?*

The phase I enjoyed the most was my time at IIM Ahmedabad where I took up a job as chief systems programmer. In those days there were few computer science graduates so we got five job offers each. I had offers from HMT, ECIL, Telco, Air India. The salary in those places was much higher than at the IIM. But Prof. Krishnayya of IIM who came to IIT Kanpur talked

to me for an hour about this great, modern mini-computer that he was going to install and that IIM would be the third business school in the world to install a time-sharing system after Harvard and Stanford. He also said that the atmosphere was collegial, we'd work 20 hours a day and learn a lot. Taking this job at a salary of Rs 800 a month was the best decision of my life.

I learnt so many things from Krishnayya. He is probably the person who influenced me the most. He taught us how important it is to aspire. We used to work 20 hours a day, go home at 3 a.m. sometimes and be back at 7 a.m. There was so much opportunity to learn. We designed and implemented a BASIC interpreter for ECIL. I learnt what it is to be an engineer. It isn't theory but application of the theory to solve problems and make a difference to society.

*You worked overseas early in your career. What did you learn from your stint abroad?*

My years in Paris were the most influential years of my life. I observed how in a western country even the socialists understood that wealth has to be first created before it can be distributed. That there could only be a few leaders to create wealth. And that it's the job of the government to create an environment where it's possible for people to create wealth. I realised that all this talk of socialism as practised in India was not meaningful. Our country treated communism as an ism that was completely disassociated from the reality of the context. You cannot distribute poverty.

My father always told us that India had a lot to learn from the West. Also, he was a great fan of classical music. On Sundays, AIR used to play music for an hour. One day I asked him: why should I listen to this alien music? He said: What appeals to me is that in a symphony there are over 100 people, each of whom is a maestro, but they come together as a team to play according to a script under this conductor and produce something divine. They prove that one plus one can be more than two. It's a great example of teamwork.

*What prompted your change of heart from being a staunch leftist?*

After my Paris stay, I donated my earnings and with \$450 in my pocket decided to return home overland. I came to Nis, a border town between the then Yugoslavia and Bulgaria to take the Sofia Express. I struck up conversation with a girl in the compartment. After about 45 minutes the train stopped, the police took the girl away, ransacked my backpack, and put me in a room that had no mattress and a window 10 ft high.

They kept me there for 60 hours after which they freed me saying that since I was from a friendly country they were letting me go. I felt that if this system treats friends this way then I did not want anything to do with it. This experience really shook me.

*So the socialist in you became a committed capitalist?*

I am a 100% free marketeer but I call myself a compassionate capitalist. While I'm very conservative in economic matters I'm very liberal about social matters. But I have no illusions about socialism. In a country like India, when we have to make capitalism an attractive alternative to people, it is extremely important for us to show tremendous compassion to the less fortunate. That doesn't mean that you should give jobs to people who don't deserve them or that you should make less profits but wherever you can show compassion you should.

*What was the initial business plan of Infosys based on?*

We were very clear that we wanted to be in India. There were many opportunities to settle outside but we wanted to create an institution in India. We knew there was hardly a market here, so we had to look at the export market from day one. At that time we had no idea how far it would go but our satisfaction comes mainly from working with bright, smart and hard-working young men and women.

Our first contract was from Databasics in New York. We had worked with them at Patni Computer Systems but they wanted to set up on their own software group in India. We convinced them that we could do as good a job. My colleagues left for the US to work on-site on the project. I stayed back to set up the infrastructure. We decided to import a computer so that we could add value from India.

*How easy or difficult was it in those days to get a business like yours off the ground?*

In those days it would take anywhere between 15 to 24 months to get a computer. We started in 1981 but our first computer was installed only in February 1984. Getting a loan was very difficult. We had worked out a time-sharing deal with MICO on the basis of which ANZ did a project report. But ANZ refused to give us the loan. Several other banks also turned us down. It was just by chance on a flight that I happened to be sitting next to K.S.N. Murthy of the Karnataka State Industrial Investment and Development Corporation, and we got our break. They redid the entire project report over 14 hours a day for a week and got it sanctioned in 15 days.

Right from day one our idea was to add value from India. To do that we needed certain factor conditions – computers, telephone lines. It took us a year to get a phone in Bangalore. There was a rule then that higher priority was to be given to retired government servants than businesses. We had a contract for \$3,50,000; in addition we would get an IBM compatible machine on loan from our customer. All that they insisted was that we have a telephone so that they could contact us. The customer said: Look I understand that you are a group of competent people, but if you want to do it from India you must convince us that you can establish a line of communication. So, much against our desire, we had to ship the team out.

One has to go through all these experiences because it makes you understand your own frailties and also helps you develop respect for God. I've been extraordinarily lucky in life. I've received much more from society than I've given. I have many friends who are much smarter, much more accomplished, but somehow life has dealt me so many good cards that I can't ascribe it to anything other than God's grace.

*Did you ever at any point feel like giving up?*

There came a time in 1990 when we were floundering. We had offers to buy us out which my colleagues thought we should consider since we weren't making too much headway. We had a 4-5 hour discussion and I could feel the sense of despondency. So I pulled a fast one. I said guys don't worry, I'll buy you out. I know it's going to be tough in this country but I have no doubt that we'll see light. In minutes, they all said that we're with you. From now onwards we will never discuss the issue of closing down, getting tired or giving up. This marathon will be restarted.

Leadership is about making what seems impossible, possible; about changing the perception of what reality is. The reality in India is dirty roads, pollution, bad traffic, etc. Reality is what we make it; it is for us to change. If you give confidence to people they can achieve tremendous things. We have run this company as professionally as any other corporation in the world in terms of the principles of corporate governance, in not using corporate resources for personal conveniences, with respect for the professional.

*What was the turning point for Infosys?*

Chance favours the prepared mind. Just as we got determined to run the marathon with much greater gusto, liberalisation happened. If there is one company that symbolises all the good that came out of liberali-

sation, it is Infosys. It did four things for us: It enhanced the velocity of decision-making in government. It used to take 8 to 12 months to get a computer and the decision depended on the *babu* in Delhi. After 1991, it wasn't necessary to go to Delhi for approvals. We could walk across to the Software Technology Park here and get licenses in half a day for \$1 million.

Second, equity became a viable financing option. Abolishing the Controller of Capital Issues had a multiplier effect on Indian enterprises. Prior to 1991, an officer was charged with the authority to decide at what premium a company went public and generally he always looked at the past. But capital markets are about the future. With low premiums, new entrepreneurs were reluctant to approach the capital markets. Once the company and lead manager were allowed to decide the premium, that set us free.

The government also liberalised the RBI rules for current account transactions. This meant that it was easy to travel abroad, establish offices and get consultants. Prior to 1991, we had to make an application to RBI which could take 5 to 10 days. Today I can travel in the next 6 hours. So it's a big change.

The most important thing is that government reversed the policy of foreign investment and allowed 100% ownership for MNCs. This is the main reason why Infosys came up. At the time many hitech companies came in and that created competition, not in the marketplace but for our human resources. People told me that Murthy your game is up, all your people will leave.

We could react in three ways: that this is our *karma*. We'll grow but not much – the Hindu philosophy. The second alternative was to lobby the government not to permit 100% ownership by MNCs. As president of Nasscom, I could have kept all these guys out. But that was against my fundamental philosophy. The third was to find out why our youngsters would want to leave us and see if we could create those conditions in Infosys.

A successful corporation is one that introspects about internal transformation first before blaming the context, competition or external circumstances. Everyone bought into this philosophy and how we could bring about a fundamental transformation. We increased our salaries, we introduced a stock option plan so that our people would have much more money than any other Indian MNC. We also decided to make it a fun place to work because our assets walk out of the door every evening mentally and physically tired. We must make sure that they come back with a zest to work.

I am a firm believer that this country has a lot to learn from the West. We have to be open-minded, learn all the good things from them, and become stronger. For me a democracy is one where people put public good before private good, where responsibilities come before the rights

*What has kept the Infosys team together through all these years?*

How do we stay together? We have unwritten rules. Everybody knows that if we want to work as a team we have to be transaction based. We start every transaction on a zero base. It is perfectly feasible for us to disagree on a transaction but we start the next transaction without any bias. Only an argument that has merit wins, it has nothing to do with hierarchy. Disagreeing is in the nature of things. When you bring a set of people who have respect for each others' competence in certain areas and you're transaction-oriented then it can work as it has in our case.

Our value system was like the British Constitution – it was all unwritten but extremely well-practiced. If I were to have another opportunity to found another company, I would never ask for anyone else – these are truly remarkable people. Our value system is the true strength of Infosys. Besides, we have complementary skills. For example, I have an eye for detail and am comfortable with balance sheets and numbers. Then I can also get into the big picture. Nandan has a great ability to communicate and get himself connected to networks; his thinking is very strategic. Raghavan is a good people manager. Gopal is the best among us in technology. Shibulal and Dinesh are great on projects – so there's a complementarity of skills

*What do you think was your best business decision?*

Well, I think the best business decision was to introspect. We will press on the pedal. We will compete with the best of the multinationals in terms of retaining people, in terms of creating a brand equity. I think if you ask me what distinguishes Infosys from many other companies, it is the following. We have a very strong value system. In fact, when I address new hires the main thing I talk to them about is the value system. I tell them that even in the most fierce competitive situation they must never talk ill of customers. For heaven's sake don't shortchange anybody. Never ever violate any law of the land. It is better to lose a billion dollars than a good night's sleep. It is a true meritocracy. Raghavan's two children are engineers but they did not come here to ask for a job. They worked

elsewhere before they went to the US to do their MBA. It is our responsibility to maintain the dignity of professionals here.

The second thing that's unique about Infosys is that we have accepted that speed and imagination are the only two context-invariant and time-invariant parameters for success. We don't think that we have any extraordinary legacy/strength that will carry us through the years. If we continue to innovate and to adapt then we will survive or else we'll disappear like dew on a summer morning. So there's a sense of paranoia and a certain fear that tomorrow we may not get food on the table if we don't satisfy our customers. We don't think anything is given to us. We're as good as our last quarterly result. If we don't do well in the next quarter, we'll be wiped out.

*So far Infosys has grown organically. Are you looking at acquisitions as a future growth strategy?*

Indeed. Adding 50% to \$500 million is so much more difficult than adding 50% to \$100 million. We are looking at acquisitions though we haven't identified any company yet. We want to look at a group/company that will add to the topline immediately but will also add to the bottomline in the medium term. Ideally it should be a small company, so that the cross-cultural issues can be handled more easily. Third, it must have an intellectual property right, either in the form of a methodology or a tool or processes which can be scaled up across Infosys for improving productivity in an emerging area like e-commerce, CRM etc. Finally, it could also be an aged technology product which has fallen on bad days but one that has a captive customer base. We can take that and enhance it technologically because we have the strength here to do that. And because there's a captive customer base it's much easier to sell. In any product, selling to the first 20 customers is the hardest.

*Many feel that software companies are riding the boom in demand for Y2K remedial work. What will be Infosys' life after Y2K?*

We will continue to be a software services company because as technology changes rapidly, companies will want to leverage the internet for gaining competitive advantage. There will be tremendous opportunities for companies like Infosys to re-engineer existing systems, enhance functionality. But the fundamental strength will have to be learnability of experience. That is, how quickly you understand a new paradigm, a new technology and apply it to bring business benefit to cus-

tomers. As long as learnability is alive and kicking at Infosys, we will have no problems about our future.

*What are the big challenges facing you?*

We have to put in systems, processes and tools to leverage technology to enhance the quality and productivity of our people. If today we take 100 hours to do something, then next year we should take 95 hours. Second, we must learn to manage growth. In spite of recruiting larger numbers we should operate as a small, closeknit, nimble company. That's the task of this management.

My vision is to make Infosys a globally respected software corporation, delivering best of breed solutions employing best in class professionals. That's different from an MNC which generally has subsidiaries in different countries, manufactures and sells there. As a corollary to that, I want it to be a place where people of different nationalities, religions and races will come together and compete in an environment of harmony and meritocracy. We believe that the local people are the best people in a given environment.

*What are the challenges that the software sector faces in the new millennium?*

One, we have to create corporate brand equity and product/services brand equity outside India. Indian industry's record of doing this has been pathetic. We have to become multicultural as local people are most effective in a local environment. And we have to learn to operate in a multicultural environment. We have few examples of Indian companies successfully doing so.

The most difficult challenge is recruiting, enabling, empowering and retaining the best and brightest talent. Enhancing per capita revenue productivity and moving up the value chain is the next big challenge because our costs are going up in India. Unless we do this, our success won't survive in the long run.

*Will Infosys move up the value chain to become a product company in the future?*

Our profitability and margins are the best in the services industry. Compare us with anybody on Nasdaq. The net income margin of Infosys is as good as any product company with the exception of Microsoft. It's not necessary to transform ourselves into a product company. In fact, in the Net economy it is services companies like Amazon.com, Priceline, eBay that have been growing. I'm not worried about traditional thinking that one must have a product. Infosys has enhanced its per capita productivity at least

10% in last five years. We are positioned to continue to be profitable.

*Does government have a role to play in the IT sector? One view is that it has grown because the government has been hands-off and now that an IT ministry has been set up it could pose a roadblock. What is your view?*

The government has a role in creating a context for Indian entrepreneurs to succeed. They should concentrate on a policy regime and not a case-by-case syndrome. If decisions of corporations are not taken in boardrooms but in some government office then we won't go anywhere. Our company has been at the leading edge in pushing the policy regime. When we got listed on Nasdaq we required a policy regime. We need the cooperation of government as we move forward

*What opportunity does the growing power of the Internet pose for your company?*

Internet is a great phenomenon particularly for a country like India because it has meant the death of distance. It has brought the anywhere, anytime paradigm. In a large resource scarce country like India, it is going to play a crucial role in ensuring that both business to business and business to customer benefits accrue much faster to both industry and consumers.

Thanks to the emergence of companies like Amazon, the traditional companies have realised that they have to shape up or ship out. So there's a tremendous emphasis on leveraging the power of the internet. We understand online transaction processing very well – we have done it for 18 years. E-commerce requires the ability to mount a robust and secure an online transaction processing engine, a certain application layer. The only difference is that you have to create a user-friendly web front end which skill we've developed in the last 2-3 years. We have a big advantage of over new e-commerce companies because the design and implementation of a high performance engine is something we've been doing for years. US corporations are in a hurry to get on to the e-commerce bandwagon and this is a clear opportunity for us.

*The stockmarket seems to have discovered the worth of IT and infotech stocks are seeing ever rising valuations. How do you react to this?*

I tell my colleagues not to look at the stockmarket. What we should worry about day after day is to provide quality products on time, within budget to our customers. We must show transparency to investors, not violate any law of the land, and be in harmony with society.

That's our main charter and we should stick to it. The stockmarket may or may not reward us even if we do that. This is ephemeral. We should not be too ecstatic about it today or get despondent if it falls tomorrow.

*People say that the intellectual elite of India are now in Silicon Valley. What is your view?*

Twenty years ago if someone had asked me whether Indians should go abroad, I would have said No. Today I have a completely different view. The need of the country today is to create a good brand equity of the country. That will be created by high quality Indians in some numbers establishing themselves abroad. I don't feel bad about it. If some people go we should cheer them, applaud them, make them feel welcome, and give them emotional support. Because they are doing a great job of enhancing the equity of India.

It's very easy to sit in India and say *Mera Bharat Mahaan*. Economic power is the only thing that counts in today's world. We have to create an image in the minds of foreigners that Indians can do it. In fact, that has already happened in the Valley. If an Indian is involved in a venture, then the venture capitalist will look positively at it. We have to convert this country so that we not only retain people here but also attract some of them back.

*What advice would you give to the next generation of entrepreneurs?*

Early to bed and early to rise and work like hell. Those people who have entrepreneurial strengths need to get a marketable idea and understand the window of opportunity for it. They have to bring together a team that has mutually exclusive, but collectively exhaustive skills and work out a value system. Entrepreneurship is about running a marathon, not a 100 metre dash.

*What does money mean to you?*

Beyond a certain level of comfort I think one's wealth should be seen as an opportunity to make a difference to society. My colleagues think so too. The power of money is the power to give. Obviously it will have to be done in a gradual manner over the years, but there's no doubt that a majority of what we have will be given to public causes.

*What drives you then if not money?*

There's a saying in America that the reward for winning a pinball game is to get a chance to play the next one. In most situations, the pleasure comes from the journey, not the destination.

# Combatting corruption

N VITTAL

HAVING spent over a year of my four-year term as Central Vigilance Commissioner, I am aware of the challenge which the forces of corruption in our country pose to individuals and organisations who want to fight it. Everyone in India pays lip service to the principle of honesty. We belong to the land of Gandhiji for whom truth and non-violence were the fundamental principles of existence. Going back in time 2000 years, I quote the Vedic dictum, '*satyam vadhahdharma charah*'. Our nation's motto is *Satyameva Jayate*. Therefore, at the level of lip service, we are all for truth and honesty. Our government believes that truth will prevail and all our religions advocate that we should tell the truth. But, the reality is that India is one of the most corrupt countries in the world.

Corruption has been defined by the World Bank as the 'use of public office for private profit.' In our country, there are five major players on the corruption scene, interdependent, strengthening and supportive of the vicious cycle. They are the *neta*, the corrupt politician; the *babu*, the cor-

rupt bureaucrat; the *lala*, the corrupting businessman; the *jhola*, the corrupt NGO; and the *dada*, the criminal of the underworld.

Recently, the World Bank cited the DDA (Delhi Development Authority) as the most corrupt organisation in India. We have seen the reaction of the DDA employees to that description. K.J. Alphons, an IAS officer on whose statement the World Bank relied and who had actually first-hand experience of having worked in the organization, was hauled over the coals by the DDA Engineers Association for besmirching the fair name of the organisation.

We understand the importance of a good reputation, both for individuals and organisations. There is a law of defamation. But even though many at an individual level confess to corruption in numerous departments, it requires collective action by associations and unions for somebody to make a general statement. Last year, I recall, someone made the statement that customs officials at the Delhi airport were corrupt. The customs staff

promptly went on strike and work came to a halt for many days. When specific organisations and services are painted as corrupt, even if confirmed through individual conversation, it becomes a matter of *amour propre* for the organisation. Since every department has some stranglehold on the governance of this country we see collective action being initiated. Ultimately, every department can blackmail the powers that be and get their way.

**T**he first challenge in fighting corruption is to establish an objective pecking order of the level of corruption as perceived by the public. Like Transparency International, NGOs and professional bodies in India must be encouraged to grade all organizations, under the purview of the CVC, according to levels of corruption. This will have the following advantages: (a) If the study is objective, it will pre-empt the kind of drama enacted by DDA employees this year and Delhi customs last year; and (b) this will enable the CVC to draw an action plan with the right priorities in the tackling of corruption.

Corruption is a two-way street. For every bribe taker, there is a bribe giver. While the debate on corruption in our country has focused on the demand side of corruption, i.e., on public servants and politicians who demand bribes, there has been a thundering silence on the supply side of corruption, i.e., around the business community which bribes the public servants and politicians. It is therefore interesting to note the business community's focus on the issue of ethics in business. Recently the CII organised a session on ethics and corporate integrity.

As CVC, I have a direct responsibility to ensure that corruption is at least eliminated so far as public ser-

vants are concerned in the Government of India. Ministries, departments, organisations like the public sector undertakings and banks, and so on should be freed of corruption.

**T**his is possible if only we have a clear idea about the dynamics of corruption, why corruption flourishes and how it can be tackled. Corruption flourishes in our system because of five basic reasons. These are: (i) scarcity of goods and services, (ii) red tape and complicated rules and procedures; (iii) lack of transparency in decision-making; (iv) legal cushions of safety for the corrupt under the 'healthy' principle that everyone is innocent till proved guilty; and (v) tribalism or *biradari* among the corrupt who protect each other. The popular phrase is 'thick as thieves' not 'thick as honest people'.

As CVC, I have adopted a three-point plan to check corruption. The first is simplification of rules and procedures. Corruption is like malaria, handled by either giving medicine to those affected or by preventing the breeding of mosquitoes. Many of our rules and procedures breed corruption. Orders have therefore been issued to check and simplify procedures. One example is a ban on post-tender negotiations in government purchases, except with the lowest bidder. Such negotiations are a flexible source of corruption.

The second step is empowering the public and bringing in greater transparency. The orders of the CVC with regard to checking corruption are in the public domain. They can be easily accessed through the website of CVC at <http://cvc.nic.in>. One such order has been referred to earlier. Another is that every office should have a board stating, 'Don't pay bribes. If anybody asks for a bribe, you can complain to the CVO, CVC.' This

way we can educate the public who come to every small office of the GOI and other organisations like banks and public sector undertakings that there is a way out if they do not want to pay bribes.

The third is effective punishment. It is here that we have miles to go. Punishing the guilty is possible under two circumstances: through departmental inquiry and through prosecution. On the former, I am forcing all government organizations to employ honest retired people to conduct departmental inquiries to be completed within six months. On prosecution, we are constrained because our courts are extremely slow. As of now, nearly 3000 cases under the Prevention of Corruption Act have been pending from two to ten years. If punishment is so slow then elimination of corruption in India will always remain a chimera.

**C**orruption flourishes because it is a low-risk, high-profit activity. One suggestion to the government is that the ill-gotten property of the corrupt be confiscated. Justice Jeevan Reddy, Chairman, Law Commission agrees and has drafted the Corrupt Public Servants (Forfeiture of Property) Act. If enacted, the CVC will at least have the powers to ensure that the corrupt do not enjoy the benefits of their ill-gotten gains. There is also the Benami Transaction Prohibition Act which can be effectively used. Even though the Act was passed in 1988 and provides for the *benami* property to be confiscated, there is no prescribed procedure. The government was asked to empower the CVC and prescribe the procedure. Twelve years later we are still waiting for the government to act.

By adopting these strategies, it is possible to tackle corruption by public servants, but what about political



corruption? In the JMM case, the Supreme Court decreed that MPs and MLAs are public servants. We must, therefore, insist that they, as public servants, must provide their annual property returns to the Speaker or the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, as the case may be. If they have benami property, then it should be equally liable for confiscation

**T**he very process by which political leaders are able to realise large amounts of money should be checked. This relates to various decisions of government – transfers, contracts, clearance of projects and so on. Normally in this process, political leaders would not be able to rake in financial benefits unless they are in collusion with corrupt public servants. There are, of course, exceptions where political leaders could still make money. Thanks to globalisation, the salting of money and ill-gotten wealth in foreign bank accounts and countries abroad has become easier.

A healthy development is that the OECD countries have come up with an anti-bribery convention. The U.S. Vice President, Al Gore, called a meeting in February 1999 of 89 countries to talk about fighting corruption globally. While global public opinion may be turning against corruption, what we have to tackle is corruption within the country.

The CBI, with the revised position of the CVC, is today in a position to take independent action. A corrupt politician, whether in power or not, is as liable for criminal suit under the Prevention of Corruption Act as any other citizen. It should, therefore, be possible for the CBI to bring corrupt politicians to book. For this we first need to beef up the CBI's strength. Second, to speed up investigation procedures, and third, to improve and speed up the prosecution pro-

cesses. The main point is that if public opinion is in favour of bringing corrupt politicians to book, there is today a method available to achieve this objective.

What about the *jhola*, the *dada* and the *lala*? If we are able to check at least the babu and the neta, perhaps there might be a salutary effect and these sectors too can be brought under control. In other words, we *can* eliminate corruption in the country. It is a question of mindset. In our country because corruption is accepted cynically and with a defeatist attitude, the people have become apathetic.

Is eliminating corruption a myth or reality? If we believe corruption can be eliminated, it can be; if not, it will remain a reality. When Vivekananda went to meet Ramakrishna Paramhansa, he asked directly, 'Does God exist? Do you believe in Him?' Ramakrishna Paramhansa supposedly replied, 'Yes, not only do I believe in Him, but I can also make you see Him?' Vivekananda has also described the experience where as Ramakrishna touched him, he felt the presence of God.

**I**n 1974 Hong Kong tackled this problem by setting up an Independent Commission Against Corruption. Apparently, the ICAC brought down corruption by systematically taking all the stakeholders into confidence and by discussing with them the processes to check corruption. Despite a strike by the Hong Kong Police against the ICAC, a series of measures were taken to bring down corruption. Lee Kwan Yew worked single-mindedly to make Singapore one of the cleanest governments in the world. In Italy, magistrates were empowered to take on the mafia and check corruption though some magistrates had to pay the ultimate price. In France too, the Italian experience was replicated. But the fact

is that these countries made an effort to bring down corruption. Similarly Rudy Giuliani, the Mayor of New York came up with the concept of zero tolerance and substantially brought down the level of crime. The point to note is that corruption can be fought and eliminated. What we need first is a determined mindset.

**C**an corruption be fought by civil society? Perhaps if we can bring three elements together. The first is the CVC in its new avatar, which thanks to the Supreme Court judgement in the Vineet Narain case, enjoys statutory powers and also exercises superintendence over the CBI, and to an extent over the Enforcement Directorate. The second is to look at the supply side of corruption. The third, of course, is mobilising the youth to fight the menace of corruption.

Ultimately, levels of corruption depends upon three factors. One relates to the values of the person in an organisation. The second is the social standards of acceptance of corruption. The third is the systems. As for systems, we have tried to provide an analysis of what could be done by the CVC as well as by organised industry. As for individual values, and thereby the shaping of social values, we need to focus on the youth. Rabin-dra Nath Tagore once observed, every time a child is born it shows that God has not lost faith in humanity. The youth still carry a spark of idealism. It may be worthwhile to start anti-corruption clubs in all colleges and educational institutions. These could be patronised by the CVC so that they have a right to expose corrupt practices in various public organisations. They should also be able to participate and help in conducting raids against corrupt public servants. This would give them a sense of involvement in cleansing the rot in our society.

Let me now turn my attention towards business perceptions about how corruption in the country has a direct bearing on global business today. The experience of Southeast Asian countries like Indonesia, Thailand and South Korea shows that if there is no corporate governance and the financial sector is not properly regulated and is subjected to crony capitalism, investments could result in disaster. Incidentally, the expression 'corporate governance' has become a fashionable buzzword because globalisation implies that in addition to traditional economic factors like physical capital in terms of plant and machinery, technology and labour, financial capital has become more mobile.

**G**iven the integration of global markets and the increasing application of information technology, billions of dollars can be transmitted from one market to another at the click of a computer mouse. When foreign financial institutions invest in an emerging market, they want to be sure that not only will the management functions be performed effectively, but that decisions will also be taken in a transparent manner and principles of corporate ethics observed. Attempts at codification of corporate governance have been made through many committees in the U.K., South Asia and elsewhere, like the Cadbury, Greenbury and King Committees. The CII, in India has come up with the Bajaj Committee report on corporate governance.

When the chips are down, integrity and corporate ethics do count in global trade today. According to a World Bank estimate, if a country is perceived to be very corrupt, the FDI goes down by about 35%; if perceived as generally corrupt, it goes down by 25%. From a purely financial point of

view, companies which have a reputation for integrity and good corporate behaviour stand to gain in this context.

**B**usiness is increasingly based on perceptions which are reflected in market sentiments. One advantage of globalisation is that the world has become a global village and competition is intense. In a highly competitive business environment, the trust of both investor and consumer becomes a valuable commodity. This is why there is so much talk about brand equity today. What ultimately lies behind brand equity is the reputation of the organisation which gives to the customer a sense of reassurance in terms of quality, transparent behaviour and value for money. Reputation and brand equity have become increasingly important with competition. We can, therefore, see that the issue of corporate ethics is directly linked to the competitive edge of an enterprise, apart from other aspects like good corporate management, productivity, quality, customer orientation and so on.

Competitive organisations, today, are marked by an increasingly closed technology, finance and people loop. In discussing ethics and corporate integrity, we have focused on the people aspect of this loop. But the other two links of technology and finance have a bearing on this aspect as well. There are two aspects with which people are concerned. The first is that if an enterprise is perceived as honest, straightforward, transparent and practising the highest values, it helps to improve the company's morale greatly. This translates into building a sense of loyalty and trust towards the organisation among employees. In this, the responsibility of the top management and particularly the CEO is important. There is no point in talking about values, or the

needs for corporate ethics, if the top management do not practice it.

The human resource is the most important factor in ensuring that a company survives in a highly competitive environment. It is said that nothing succeeds like success. If in today's global market, success is going to depend upon brand equity or company reputation, apart from other non-human parameters like productivity, quality and so on, the role of corporate ethics becomes central and critical.

**T**he second aspect about the impact of people on technology and finance in the context of corporate integrity is using technology to ensure, particularly in relation to financial matters, that there is better check on people's behaviour. The use of information technology has immense value in this context. Take banks for example. They deal with money, and trust is fundamental for their business. Trust includes not only a sense of security but also physical security. Information technology can be used to check corruption and to detect fraud and ensure that the scope for temptation and erosion of corporate ethics is reduced to a minimum.

Computerisation can be of immense value especially in preventing frauds and corruption in the banking sector. After becoming the CVC, I issued an order, insisting that public sector banks computerise at least 70% of their business before January 2001. Also that information regarding wilful defaulters be circulated among the banks. The wide area networks (WAN) of the RBI can be used for this purpose.

Prevention, after all, is better than cure. In mechanical engineering we talk about preventive, predictive and breakdown maintenance. When it comes to business frauds, it is always better to adopt preventive and predic-

tive maintenance principles rather than the breakdown maintenance principle, which is like locking the stable doors after the horse has bolted. A classic example is the Harshad Mehta scam where because of lack of computerisation in the Public Debt Office of the Reserve Bank of India, a Rs 18,000 crore scam was perpetrated. It was only after the fraud was unearthed that the RBI computerised the Public Debt Office.

**W**e must understand that the nature of frauds is constantly changing. The increasing application of information technology and computers has brought about benefits in terms of speed and efficiency of business operations. It has also provided opportunities for a new generation of crimes – cyber crimes. In our country the degree of computerisation is very low. Having, however, become a part of the WTO and other agreements like the Information Technology Agreement, Global Agreement on Telecommunication and so on, it is necessary that our systems meet global standards. But what we lack today is a basic legal framework for the electronic business. Though the government has been urged to issue an ordinance for cyber laws and, for the last two years, it has before it a draft legislation for cyber laws, the bill has yet to be introduced.

Does computerisation help banks in prevention and early detection of frauds? Broadly speaking there are (a) frauds in non-credit areas and (b) frauds in credit areas. In non-credit areas, frauds relate mainly to fraudulent encashment of cheques, withdrawal slips, refund orders, demand drafts, bankers cheques, misappropriation, as also fraudulent transactions entered by the bank's staff in the branch books. Computerised systems will help in prevention, as also early

detection, of frauds which will save banks precious funds.

There are those who want to observe secrecy regarding wilful defaulters. In my view it is better that such people are exposed so that the public knows who they are and their role in the growth of the non performing assets in our banking sector to the tune of Rs 45,000 crore. This might also help the public understand the paradox of sick industries but healthy industrialists. They fall sick only when the CBI raids them. A greater transparency in transactions can help reduce the scope for fraud.

A fraud essentially involves either individual initiative or collusion among many people. On this, I am reminded of what a banker once said. He was more afraid of the loyal worker than the sincere one. The sincere worker puts in long hours and goes home. But the loyal worker not only puts in long hours, he never takes leave, so he is able to run parallel accounts and play with the system. As such, he can wreak havoc.

**O**ne method of minimising frauds is to put in place effective punishment systems. Our legal systems are so dilatory that the guilty often escape and even if punishment is meted out, it takes a long time. Often, the fraudster has so many resources at his command that he can engage the best legal brains to buy his way to freedom. We should rework the punishment regimen and our legal system to ensure speedy punishment to the corrupt and the guilty.

The need for training in computerisation and using information technology for enhancing the level of security in the financial institutions becomes especially important because ultimately, as Oscar Wilde said, the thief is the artist and the policeman only a critic. What computerisation does is provide a means of processing

a vast amount of data, which *inter alia* also give an idea about the *modus operandi* of fraudsters. Intelligent application of these concepts can help in preventing corruption and fraud.

**H**ow can corporate ethics and integrity be nurtured in an organisation. This depends on the people in the organisation. When it comes to individuals, their commitment to ethics depends upon three factors: the individual's sense of values, what the society accepts as a norm, and the systems which will ensure that the best practices are adopted. In the context of corporate governance, the setting up of external committees such as the ethics committees and the finance committees ensures that the stakeholders' interests are taken care of. For corporate integrity, at the management level, we can also look at the system. However, when it comes to the social and individual levels, there is not much that can be done. Some corporations can look upon themselves as models which play a role in upholding healthy values. While this is good in itself, at the corporate level, the management challenge is to evolve a system which will inculcate a sense of ethics and corporate integrity. Ultimately, every system is only as good or as bad as the people who implement it.

In the ultimate analysis, the best solution to combat corruption is to practice what the *Taitreya Upanishad* preaches. Let us come together, let us enjoy together, let our strengths of knowledge come together, let there be light, let there be no poison of misunderstanding or hatred. Then we will achieve success and peace. That way lies progress.

*Sahanavavatu sahanaubhaunaktu  
sahaviryam kara va vahai  
Tejasvinam adutamastu ma vid visha  
vahai, om shanti shanti shanti*

# People's planning, Kerala's dilemma

K P KANNAN

THE 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments in 1993 marked a watershed in India's quest for democratic development within a pluralistic, parliamentary, electoral framework. This, despite the dismal performance of many states in the country in decentralisation of administration and devolution of powers. The constitutional mandate in establishing and institutionalising a third tier of government is a guarantee against walking away from this responsibility, as has been the tendency in the past.

The real test of the effectiveness of the mandate of decentralisation, however, depends on the success of those states which took up this task seriously, viz. Kerala. While the constitutional amendments came as a golden opportunity for serious decentralisation, there were compelling internal dynamics that contributed to the political acceptability and commitment to this task. The 'Kerala way to development' – some call it, inappropriately in my view, a model – is now at a crossroads. Its achievements in a variety of aspects of social deve-

lopment are nothing less than spectacular given its low income and low level of productive capacity. The expectation was that such spectacular achievements in social development would, and should, lead to much higher levels of economic development than has been achieved so far. But that is not around the corner and the wait continues.

Decentralisation was thought of, if not as a panacea for all ills, as a way out of this logjam. It was expected to facilitate local level development by mobilising both people and resources to strengthen the productive base, especially in the primary sector by creating and maintaining public and collective goods such as in land and water management and agricultural extension. It could also add to the already created, widely spread social infrastructure such as schools and health care centres and create appropriate ones for drinking water, sanitation and so on.

In fact, the urge for decentralisation went beyond this. The aim was the establishment and institutional-

sation of local self-government. It was in 1957, after the victory of the then undivided Communist Party in state elections, that an agenda of decentralisation was first formulated in the form of a bill for enactment. With the dismissal of this government in 1959, the bill met an untimely death, not unlike the historic land reform bill. While the land reform agenda went through a series of revisions and compromises before being finally enacted in 1971, the agenda of decentralisation remained stalled because successive governments had better things to do than decentralise their power. Though the agenda came up again in the national context of the Janata Party coming to power at the centre, but unlike Karnataka and West Bengal, Kerala's coalition politics could not accommodate decentralisation seriously, let alone give a lead. A minor exception was the short-lived experiment of the creation of district councils during 1990-91.

The debate on decentralisation, however, continued. An important contribution to this debate and preparatory work at the local level came from the unceasing work of a large, well-spread voluntary organisation, the KSSP (Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad), better known as a people's science movement to the rest of the country. Developmentalism, as represented by the work of KSSP and a number of emerging independent groups and organisations, was in sharp contrast to the dominant paradigm of development politics. The former stressed people's participation, awareness creation, popularisation, sensitising structures of government to people's needs, and the need to debate alternatives to existing models of development. The issues it took up were cross-cutting, broad-based and relevant to the common people. The per-

ennial issue of inefficiency and corruption was a major one. Access to and enhancing the quality of education and health care were two other common concerns, as was the adverse impact of environmental degradation. While women's issues were highlighted, it is 'women's groups' which were, and still are, in the forefront of this agenda. People's participation was sought to be advanced through taking up local level development work.

The latter, on the other hand, stressed 'bargaining' by organising homogeneous interest groups such as workers, government employees, farmers, castes and communities in hierarchical organisations. The bargaining model found favour with political parties, irrespective of their hue and colour. The tension between these two paradigms is now manifest in the controversies surrounding the decentralisation process.

When the constitutional amendments took effect in 1993, the way was cleared for passing legislation in the state assembly. The then Congress-led government came up with a bill, but it was more marked by provisions to throttle the spirit of decentralisation. In the ensuing public debate, pro-decentralisation leaders from all political parties including the Congress, lobbied for introducing amendments for a more genuine legislation on decentralisation. Intellectuals and voluntary organisations took the lead in organising public opinion and finally an amended version of the bill was passed.

Elections to the local bodies were conducted by the Congress government under the chief minister-ship of A.K. Antony who replaced K. Karunakaran. 60% of the local bodies were won by the then opposition Left Democratic Front (LDF) can-

didates while the remaining 40% went to the United Democratic Front (UDF) candidates. When the LDF came to power in the 1996 elections to the state assembly, thanks to the sustained efforts of the late E.M.S. Namboodiripad, the agenda of decentralisation was the first one taken up.

It was decided that 40% of the plan budget of the state would be earmarked for expenditure by the local bodies at the village, block and district levels, as decided by them. People's needs were to be assessed through meetings of the *gram sabhas* with the village panchayat making it into a plan, coordinated and vetted at the block level and approved at the district level by a district planning committee constituted to assist the panchayats. This was the 'People's Campaign for Ninth Plan', popularly known as 'People's Planning' (*Janakeeya Aasoothranam*). The word 'decentralisation' or 'panchayat raj' was nowhere in circulation.

To start with there was much euphoria and expectation. There seemed to exist, surprisingly for a state marked by intense party political contestation, a degree of political consensus. A high power guidance council was created with E.M.S. Namboodiripad as the chairman, the incumbent and former chief ministers and the leader of the opposition as vice-chairmen, and a few persons of eminence as members. This was ostensibly to give formal expression to the perceived political consensus. The State Planning Board, hitherto an expert advisory body, suddenly acquired a political profile.

The board had by then been reconstituted with party-political nominations that included two state-level party functionaries of the CPM. It also became an implementing agency for activities under 'People's

Planning', chalked out a five-phase programme of activities, and went into a high-speed mode of functioning unheard of in government organisations. This was possible only because of the political profile and organisational abilities of the political nominees to the board. A special cell was created to cope with the challenges of this new task. Many of the personnel in this cell were drawn from voluntary organisations with a track record of selfless work.

**I**n the first phase, gram sabhas were convened and people at the local level mobilised to assess felt needs. In the second phase, 'development seminars' were held in every village panchayat, followed by formation of 'task forces' for the preparation of development projects. 12,000 task forces were formed that worked out to around 12 task forces per village panchayat. Close to 120,000 people participated in these task forces. In the third phase, development reports were prepared according to a format suggested by the state planning board, giving details such as the nature of activities envisaged and financial and organisational aspects.

Despite such quantitative achievements, a review by the state planning board showed that 'the task forces did not function as effectively as was expected. The main weakness was that adequate number of experts could not be attracted to the task forces. The participation of officials was also far from satisfactory. The training given to the task force members was also inadequate. An interim review of the projects prepared revealed numerous weaknesses, particularly with respect to technical details and financial analysis. Accordingly, a number of rectification measures like project clinics, reorientation conferences, etc. were organised. All

these created unforeseen delays in the final plan preparation'. (Government of Kerala, *Economic Review*, 1998:201)

**B**y the time the fourth phase started, the financial year 1996-97 was over. This phase, from March to May 1997, was expected to prepare five year plans for the panchayats based on their development projects. This was no easy task since it involved prioritising projects, assessing resources and institutional capacity, weaving the plan into the development strategy of the state, coordinating it with other village panchayats within the block and district level developmental framework and spelling out mechanisms for supervision and monitoring. The mettle of people's planning was too frail for this task.

The fifth and final phase was meant for the preparation of annual plans for block and district panchayats by integrating the lower level plans and, presumably, to developing their own plans that would be complementary to the village panchayat plans.

Given the delays and inadequacies in the preparation of village panchayat plans, this exercise could not be undertaken. To quote the Planning Board, the lead agency: 'As a result, there were many instances of duplication of planning activities and also critical gaps between the various tiers' (*ibid*:201). Even when projects and plans were available, it was realised that most of them had to be examined closely for their 'technical soundness and viability.' This led to another phase with the formation of expert committees and project appraisal teams to scrutinise and approve the projects and plans.

The initial difficulties partially flew from the massive nature of the programme. But before these could be properly assessed and remedial mea-

asures initiated, a controversy erupted. The coalition partners of the CPM charged that the programme was being politicised to suit partisan interests. They alleged that political nominations abound right from the Planning Board to the village level task forces and expert committees. Instances of corruption and favouritism were levelled against many panchayats. The complaint was that the coalition partners were not being given their share.

**C**ertain decisions of the government now began to attract political criticism from the opposition led by the Congress party. It was revealed that the panchayats could not spend more than 10% of the earmarked funds at the end of the first year of people's planning, i.e. by March 1997. The government initially extended the expenditure period by three months; when this was found inadequate the period was extended upto 31 March 1999, i.e. an extension of two years, understandable given the massive exercise based on a 'campaigning' mode.

During the second year too, the panchayats could not spend more than 10% of the earmarked funds of around Rs750 crore<sup>1</sup> and the period of expenditure was extended by another three months to the end of June 1998 with the stipulation that unspent balances would be deducted from future allocations. By end June 1998, the panchayats formally reported 95% expenditure, the bulk of the funds were withdrawn during the final month. This was due to an interesting innovation. The panchayats withdrew

<sup>1</sup> The amounts given here represent only the funds made available by the state government. The other sources of funds are the centrally-sponsored projects, internal revenue, loans from cooperative banks, voluntary contributions and beneficiary contributions

the amount from the government treasuries and deposited them either in public sector organisations (such as the State Electricity Board), which were supposed to execute works for them, or in their bank accounts. And these were shown as 'expenditure'. For the third year, 1998-99, the funds earmarked were Rs 970 crore but accounts have as yet not been finalised. Meanwhile the allocation for the fourth year, 1999-2000, was enhanced to Rs 1020 crore. Project preparations, however, have not yet been finalised well into the eighth month of the financial year.

**O**bviously, the 'campaigning' mode was seriously flawed especially in the context of raising people's expectations to levels beyond the system's capability to respond. Decentralised planning is not like celebrating festivals, although it is the 'festive approach' that characterises the launching of many a government programme in Kerala, with little serious work done before or sustained work after.

In this melee of confusion and division within the LDF, the opposition led by the Congress Party began a political attack on the people's planning variant of the decentralisation process. They declared that political consensus no longer existed and alleged that the programme was being tailored to suit the interests of the leading ruling party. The UDF constituted an enquiry committee and published a report sharply critical of the implementation of the programme, presenting evidence of corruption and mismanagement from a selected number of panchayats.

The real reasons for the ire of opposition parties, especially the Congress, were obviously political in nature. The Congress Party felt that the credit for the decentralisation pro-

gramme was being appropriated by the CPM in the name of people's planning neglecting their party's, especially Rajiv Gandhi's, contribution to the 1993 constitutional amendments. It also felt that despite its contribution to the passage of the Panchayat Raj Bill in the state assembly and holding elections under its regime, a different story was being scripted to deny them due credit. Hence the emphasis on the breakdown of political consensus.

**T**he concept of 'hegemony' is dear to the political party leading the people's planning. Despite compulsions of electoral democracy, or because of it, every organisation or institution is sought to be hegemonised – be it organisations of white collar employees, workers, cooperatives, students, women or even cultural bodies. But the flip side of hegemony is that the organisation has to pay a price – in the form of succumbing to their sectarian interests. Gradually sectarian interests overshadow common developmental interests, as witnessed in Kerala over a period of time. Since other parties followed the same model, this led to a fragmented political structure in every realm of public action. The space for political consensus simply did not exist. How can people's planning alone be an exception to this rule, observers ask.

This has exposed the paradigmatic limits of development politics in the state. Hierarchical organisations such as employees associations, trade unions, students organisations and the cooperative bodies have not been enthused to support and strengthen the decentralisation process. Many organisations, especially the associations of government employees, are openly antagonistic, as revealed in their opposition to several attempts to deploy departmental staff to various tiers of panchayat raj.

A committee set up to recommend measures for the implementation and institutionalisation of the decentralisation process, chaired by the former vice chairman of the West Bengal State Planning Board, S.B. Sen, had submitted a four volume report that included detailed recommendations including deployment of departmental staff. However, resistance from the associations of government employees was such that so far no substantive steps have been taken by the government.<sup>2</sup> While powerful sections in every political party oppose the decentralisation process, because of the enactment of the Panchayat Raj Bill, they are all formally committed. But there is no such compulsion for the bureaucracy, especially its powerful organised tiers at the middle and lower levels. Why should they submit to a process leading to a loss of their power and patronage?

**G**iven such political imponderables, it is no surprise that the decentralisation process, or its Kerala variant in the name of people's planning, is faced with fundamental constraints in institutional capacity building. What has been followed so far was called 'a big bang approach' by deciding devolution of 40% of plan funds and embarking on a 'campaigning' mode to shake up the system. But it was also like putting the cart before the horse, nay the bullock. Panchayats could not cope with the administrative or organisational challenges of spend-

2 This is despite the political hold of the leading parties in the LDF over the associations of government employees. A recent controversy pertains to the attempt of the government to enforce timely attendance of employees in offices. A suggestion for introduction of a 'punching system', as in factories, is being vehemently opposed by a section of the employees. In such a context, the agenda of redeployment of staff seems a tall order indeed.

ing so much money (nearly one to one-and-a-half crore of rupees per panchayat per annum).

**T**he absence of sound administrative support created a critical vacuum and often led to conflicts between an 'inexperienced' political executive and an 'experienced' administrative executive. Technical support was near absent and hence the involvement of 'key resource persons' and 'expert committees'. The powerful and large rent-seeking departments in government, particularly in public utilities such as irrigation, public works, water supply and electricity distribution, did not give up their considerable powers. That limited the powers of the panchayats, especially at the block and district levels, in creating and maintaining critical infrastructure.

At the same time some small gains, significant in my view, have been made. For the first time, village panchayats have been freed from the clutches of the Public Works Department in matters relating to the design and implementation of construction works. So too in the case of minor, really minor, irrigation and small drinking water projects.<sup>3</sup> Overall, given such dismal failures to restructure and redeploy the bureaucratic system, a demand has arisen for the establishment of a Development Administrative Service along the lines of the Indian Administrative Service. A paradigmatic challenge indeed to the mediocratic hegemony in the state's bureaucratic system!

3 Even then panchayats have not been forthcoming in the creation of such infrastructure. Of the total plan, they have earmarked only 20% under the head 'infrastructure' which almost wholly consists of 'roads and bridges'. There is a distinct preference for 'individual beneficiary-oriented programmes' such as distribution of seeds, livestock, housing grant, books, uniforms, and so on with ample scope for political patronage.

The peoples' planning variant of decentralisation has also brought into the open the tension between the role of voluntary organisations and the political parties and their affiliate organisations such as trade unions. It is no exaggeration that but for the whole-hearted cooperation and support of voluntary organisations, principally the KSSP with its all-Kerala network and COSTFORD<sup>4</sup> (largely in Thrissur district), people's planning would not have been able to do the considerable amount of preparatory work it has done. As for example, in mobilising people, conducting seminars and camps, working as resource persons, drawing up projects and development reports, organising training programmes and the publication of a large number of books, manuals and guidelines.

**B**ut this has invited the ire of political parties who think that their exclusive terrain – with electoral implications – is now being inundated with what may be called independent (of party politics) organisations (non-party political formations). The dilemma of political parties is now real. It was only the other 'day' that the national leadership of the principal political party leading the decen-

4. COSTFORD stands for Centre of Science and Technology for Rural Development, a voluntary organisation, started under the leadership of the late C. Achuta Menon after he relinquished chief ministership. While in power he tried in vain to get the low-cost, but ecologically appropriate, building construction technology developed by Laurie Baker, approved by the government system. But its diffusion accelerated principally due to the work of COSTFORD which is also engaged in a number of rural development programmes. However, it was largely due to the insistence of Achuta Menon that the government system took cognizance of the need to examine 'alternatives' in construction works. It took exactly three decades for this alternative to be accepted by the government system, albeit limited to local level works.

tralisation process in Kerala had labelled all NGOs (including voluntary organisations) as 'agents of imperialism' out to 'deflect from the cause of radical socialist transformation.'<sup>5</sup> The same party now finds itself beholden to the commitment and support of voluntary organisations in pushing the agenda of decentralisation. That might perhaps explain why there is no public acknowledgement of the crucial role of these voluntary organisations. Instead, no effort is spared to deny due credit to their work. The tension between democratic centralism and democratic decentralisation is palpable.

**T**here is another factor that, I think, will have equally significant and long term implications for the politics of development in Kerala and indeed in the country as a whole. This is the role of women. Despite the acknowledged and remarkable contribution of women in Kerala in achieving basic developmental capabilities – as in reducing population growth, enhancing literacy, schooling, child care and life expectancy – social opportunities for enhancing women's participation in the public realm remain severely constrained.

The one-third representation in elected panchayats would never have become a reality without constitutional backing. Women in leadership positions in the panchayats have often felt the heat from men and some have been forced to abdicate, even though many women representatives are related by family and kinship to men in politics. More important, their political visibility remains low in this 'socially and politically progressive' state of Kerala. Nevertheless, the educated, unemployed and unrecognised

5 Prakash Karat, 'Action Groups/Voluntary Agencies' A Factor in Imperialist Strategy', *The Marxist*, April-June 1984.



women, especially the younger ones, are waiting for an opportunity.

**A** meeting convened by a voluntary organisation in Thrissur to discuss 'women's issues' witnessed participation of over 1000 women from the district. More than 5000 women turned up, giving a jolt to the organisers! Political parties are sore that women are being mobilised by organisations independent of party politics. The subtle opposition is increasingly becoming open. On this issue at least political consensus is not found wanting. Here again one can discern a paradigmatic challenge to the male monopoly in public action for development.

Given such challenges in the context of the development dilemmas facing Kerala, what are the prospects for the decentralisation process? A major achievement of the current programme, it must be recognised, is that the agenda of decentralisation has been forced into the public discourse on development. This alone should ensure that future governments are not tempted to walk away from this challenge.

Over 100 village panchayats are in the forefront of implementing the current decentralisation programme with imaginative projects backed by effective participation from elected representatives, officials, voluntary organisations and contributions from local people in a variety of ways. But this accounts for only around 10% of the total number of 990 village panchayats. Going by independent reports, another 30-40% may have some record of effective implementation in one area or another. The remaining may not have much to show except spending money—distributing umbrellas, *chappals*, dictionaries, utensils, goats and chickens. They pose the most formidable challenge to the institutionalisation of democratic decentralisation.

The single-most important factor that will determine the success or otherwise of the constitutionally mandated panchayat raj system in Kerala – and I am sure in the rest of the country too – is the ability of our political society to forge a modicum of political consensus in its implementation. It certainly calls for a paradigmatic shift away from intense political contestation, from narrowly defined party-political interests on every issue at the local level to suit the short-term interests of those in power. Such a political consensus can also, in my opinion, enable the much needed restructuring and reorientation of the bureaucracy to meet the new challenges of development administration.

**P**olitical society will have to not only recognise but help the development of a civil society where the contributions of independent and collective initiatives are valued and countervailing institutions respected. Ordinary people should be seen as citizens, not clients. Such a shift will, in my opinion, help evolve panchayat raj as an institution of local self-government. People expect not only development functions but also civic functions to be brought under panchayat raj.<sup>6</sup> The social terrain in Kerala with a vigilant public, vigorous press, vibrant voluntary organisations and the unutilised and underutilised energies of younger men and women, willing and waiting, is more than ready. A new paradigm of development politics has to emerge and respond to this social reality.

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6. In this way the country may pay a small tribute to the original author of the panchayat raj whom we honour as the father of the nation. It is ironic that the Kerala variant of panchayat raj is conspicuous by its silence on any reference to this man.

# Workers of the sea

SUSAN VISVANATHAN

I met Peter Thayil, coordinator of the Fishworker's Development Forum in the diocese of Alleppey. In an interview he told me that the year 1984, which most people see as the landmark of the fisherpeople's struggle, was not the beginning. In 1971, the Catholic Fishermen's Union was established. In 1974, it became known as the Latin Catholic Union, linking fishermen all over Kerala. Fr. Paul Arakkal was the first union president. In 1978, the Fisherfolk Association was formed; the term Catholic was removed. Thereafter, it became known as the Akhila Kerala Swatantra Fishworker's Federation. It was at this point that Fr. Tom Kocherry began to emerge as a hero.

For Peter Thayil, who enjoys a solid faction of support within the Church's established body, Kocherry and others appeared as secessionist in the '80s because they brought in the excitement of Liberation Theology which articulated the power of the poor, the praxis of the impoverished. They were gifted leaders who had influence in the world and a guiltless preoccupation with temporal concerns. Many of these leaders also

belonged to Orders which allowed *sanyasa*, while leaders like Fr. Paul could not wander at will and were tied to a parish. 'So there was a clash, a clash of priests.' The Bishops asked the fishermen, the leaders to compromise, to come together. Yet, Thayil argues that because of the differences there was an abyss, and the entire movement went through a paralysis.

Today Thayil and his friends feel that because of large scale unionism, which integrated fishers across the subcontinent, the movement in Kerala has itself become diffused. If the Fishermen's Development Forum is now becoming an active force it is because it answers the real, ground-level needs of the poor for shelter, employment, medicine and schooling. Many of the benefits of the struggle were wrested from the government before 1984. These included pension (Peter said it was Rs 75 per month), insurance for sea accidents, education grants, housing loans, subsidized kerosene for out-board motors, and so on.

Fr. Paul, according to Thayil, fought hard for many of these benefits by sitting on the road in front of the secretariat till he was heard. His sup-

porters feel that fame has been bad for the movement, that the leaders became ensnared by publicity, and that many of the local heroes went unsung. They feel that post-1984 the two main benefits were a savings cum relief scheme and a ban on trawling for 45 days. The last meant nothing – the ban must be effective for three months if the sea is to replenish itself.

**T**he fishermen argue that there have been so many commissions – the Babu Paul, Balan Krishnan Nair, Kalavar, Murari and Oscar Fernandes commissions. While the Murari Commission report is acceptable to the fisherpeople, the rest are seen as biased towards the trawler fishers. Why is this so? ‘The IAS officers, the politicians, the government in general is ignorant and in league with capitalist trawler owners. We keep going to the Thiruvananthapuram secretariat to depose. But there are trawler owners who have become ministers: Baby John for instance. Further, so much money is involved. Licenses involve crores of rupees. Everyone receives *kai kuli* (hand-tax or corruption money). The bureaucrats are completely ignorant. Do they have even one fisherman in the commission?’

Thayil believes that the fisherman’s knowledge is a resource that has not been utilized adequately in making decisions that affect their livelihood, their community, their lives. He continued, ‘I can tell what fish is swimming in the water from a distance but these specialists cannot because they only have reports, papers, jargon. I have knowledge of the sky, the currents, the water, its smell, its colour, its depth (*madam, neram, arram*) without measuring with instruments. We know the depth of the sea.’

Other fishermen at the beach told me that they know the presence of fish from the way the crows fly,

from the movement of the waters, the shadows of the water, the sounds that can be heard from birds, from the bubbles of air that appear on the water as the fish surface. A boy goes to sea only when he is around fourteen or older, and the knowledge is passed on by his elders and by his own powers of observation since it is a matter of survival. ‘The sea cannot crush us,’ said one man, ‘I know the wind, the lightning, the depths.’

The sea is now empty because of overfishing. The governments at the Centre have been deeply implicated. Justin, an activist at the Fishworkers Development Forum in Alleppey said, ‘It was the Narasimha Rao government which provided deep sea licenses. At that time the BJP contested it. Now the BJP is giving licenses. Only in Kerala do we have a fisheries minister. At the Centre fisheries are a part of agriculture. We demand this, because the entire coast of India stretches for 6200 kms and Kerala’s coast is 900 km in length. Water encircles India, and its wells, lakes, ponds, constitute India, so that there is more water than land. And yet 50 years of Independence has meant 50 years of avoidance of the fishing communities.’

**T**he sea is now empty because of overfishing. One fisherman said to me, ‘Thakazhy Sivasankara Pillai made millions out of his novel [*Chemeen*] on the life of fisherpeople. Are you also going to do the same? I get up at two in the morning and I get nothing.’

Because of the intrusion of multinational and trawling interests, the fishermen feel their lives are over. The government receives foreign exchange, while the scarcity of fish leads to the decimation of the fisherpeoples. Sardines, mackerel, tuna, ribbon fish are almost wiped out. Trawlers operate in the *theraekadal*, the shallow waters which are 50 kms

from the shore where the fish come for cohabitation. Trawlers are engaged in over-harvesting the sea in its reproductive months. Commission after commission bypasses the problem out of ignorance or corruption.

‘It is because of absolute ignorance and the GAAT policy agreements that the collaboration between government, multinationals and trawler owners is destroying traditional fishermen,’ Vijayan told me in a house at Ponnappra. The woman who owned the house was a widow, one of the few who went to get fish from the beach to sell. Most other women stay at home, busy with household tasks as well as weaving coir ropes to supplement the erratic income their husbands bring in. In an earlier essay, ‘1984: The fishing struggle in Kerala’, I had argued that peasants and fisherfolk cannot be clubbed together. The sensitivity to their difference is imperative.

**V**ijayan said that the basic problem is that the central government has a financial perspective on everything, and the foreign exchange it receives through licensing trawlers or the export of fish is solely what it is concerned with. ‘There has to be a social transformation. Multicapitalism is being favoured. Trawler fishing is a political collaboration, where even the IMF and World Bank are implicated as “development agents”. This has to be changed. The relationship of the fisherpeople is to the sea and to nature.’ Yet there is a paradox. The fisherpeople have themselves moved away from the *kattamaran* to a mechanized boat, which they continue to call *vallum* or country boat. (This is characteristic of Alapuzha, Kochi and Trichur, while in Thiruvananthapuram the *kattamaran* or the raft is still in use.)

The *vallum* in Ponnappra are old, large country boats, with curved

prows, deep black in colour. They carry flags of different colours, and when they go out to sea one feels oneself to be in the presence of an ancient maritime culture. But each boat has a motor and is dependent on the Honda and Yamaha-Suzuki companies.

**A**n old woman, Esther, whose husband and sons still go out to sea said, 'We are a people who know only hunger and cold and debt. Since the coming of the "engines" (mechanised boats) we have known only debt. The government is in league with the capitalists. The engines cost Rs 1.4 lakh. Only the Yamaha-Suzuki motors can withstand the water, the Indian ones powder in no time, and despite the investments, on most days the men come back empty-handed. The cost of oil is hard to bear. The children of fishermen no longer want to follow this occupation. The strikes are endless, but there is no way out because the government does not hear our problems.

'We have no water, no electricity, no toilets. As soon as there is a haul, the creditors also appear. Nobody wants us to form cooperatives. This is a different matter from the union. Everyone wishes to stand separately. When there is a shortage here from overfishing people bring fish from Tamil Nadu, so again we are the losers. Here people are fishing from morning to night, from night to morning. What chance is there of the sea replenishing itself? The local fishermen have become their own enemies. They have adapted their nets in imitation of the trawlers. The trawlers have to be stopped and the continuous harvesting of the sea regulated.'

John Paul, a fisherman and an activist in the struggle, put the problems of the movement brilliantly. 'Kocherry's concerns are too abstract and political. The real problem is

whether the fisherpeople will even survive? Each one of us is treated as a member of a political party. They come for votes at every election. We took out a notice reminding them of their promises: glasses (i.e., spectacles) for the old; house loans which have not been given; subsidized machine oil which has been stopped. The Coastal Regulation Act does not affect us. It will not be recognized: no fisherman has broken rules against nature or the government. Each fisherman has his own method—he cannot leave his cove, the neighbourhood and group solidarity that he already has.'

He argues that tribals and fisherpeople share the same conditions of degradation—economic and social. Yet, in deciding on the degradation marker (*daridram*) or the poverty line, the government decided that the fisherpeople were 60% above and 40% below. John Paul says that on the beach 98% of this occupational community is below the poverty line. He argues that their only income is from the sea. Out of 365 days, they get on an average income for 150 to 200 days. The remaining days they get nothing, even if they are able to go to work.

**T**he expense for taking out a boat with 35 to 40 workers is Rs 40,000. The boat is usually owned by a *modulali* or landowner (capitalist) who may also be a commission agent, i.e. he gets the privilege of selling the fish. The fishermen catch and bring the fish to shore, then the agent takes over from them. He auctions the baskets; the fishermen say that out of every 10 baskets, they keep aside two for the poor (and there are many beggars on the beach).

Once the catch is sold, the fishermen receive 70%, the agent receives 30%. Out of the 70%, the costs of the boat, petrol, 'tea' for 40 workmen—all

have to be met: the remaining has to be shared between the 40 fishers. After they have paid their debts they may get a few rupees at the end. The next day might bring in a new catch, fresh hopes, a new start—or more debts and renewed despair. They feel the situation cannot be changed unless the overkill by the trawlers is stopped. But then trawler owners have been ministers—Baby John for instance.

**I**n June 1998, a *chakara* had formed 10 kilometres from Ponappra. What is a *chakara*, literally translated as a 'dead sea'? Peter and Justin describe it to me as the uterus of the sea. 'Science does not have a word for it,' Justin says, 'they call it a phenomenon.' But the fishermen know that it exists. For some of them it is like a miracle. In the empty days of monsoon fallowness (except fallow now is a bitter term) it does not suggest rest and reproduction, it only conveys a savage aridity.

The *chakara* is a belt of sedimentation which creates a heaviness in the sea; the torrential and dangerous monsoon sea becomes passive, docile and can be entered. This is the sedimentation of 41 rivers that run in Kerala from East to West, into the Arabian Sea, consisting of silt, clay and organic materials. This quiet and limpid space allows the fisherpeople to voyage out, provides them with some income at a time when fishing is impossible. The sea is otherwise so rough that were they to go out in other parts of the coast, their boats would break and their bodies would be crushed.

I went with Peter Thayil to the *chakara*, a natural formation that is extremely beautiful to see. Alapuzha beach is ferocious at this time of the year. As gigantic waves crash black sea against white sand, even standing on the beach is dangerous. At this time

the sea erosion is severe and many fisherpeople have lost all their belongings, and their houses.

Sebastian, an old fisherman told me, 'The sea is alive like we are. We are afraid of the sea. We tell our problems to God. We are a free people. We have no union. Anyone can enter, anyone can leave. When the storms come, we can only pray. I pray to the Mother (Mary) and the sea becomes calm. We are a people with little education, because we are poor. We are always hungry: sometimes three days at a time. But we are not beggars, and we are not thieves.'

'I won't even ask my brothers for money when I've not had a catch. If they give me something, it's alright. Otherwise the next morning, without even drinking coffee, I'll go to sea again and again till my luck changes or I die. We have no union, therefore, no provident fund and no gratuity. In our old age we don't even get fish to eat. Our children have children of their own, and they have to be educated. If anything is left after that they give to us. I had nine children. God gave me children. The only union now is the Church.'

**S**ebastian insists that all go to sea together in the spirit of fraternity, regardless of religion. But there are tensions: the RSS is consolidating; the Church is a segmented presence; the commission agents are seen to be simultaneously profiteers and upper class Christians. The trawler owners are often upper caste Christians (i.e., the Syrian Christian aristocracy). For the fishermen of Ponappra, who fear the sea, and see their work as infused by *bhakti* (faith), courage and despair, knowledge of the sea is impossible. 'We cannot say our work brings us happiness. It is not like a "beach" as it appears to milk-drinkers like you. For us it is hard work.'

After they return empty handed, fishermen wait on the beach the entire day. If they see anyone returning with a catch, they go back to sea to try once more. Many of them are out at three in the morning, depending on the flashlight on their boat and the phosphorescence of the fish. If they return without a catch, they wait till three in the evening before going out.

**T**he chakara or limpid sea is a beautiful colour, brown green and placid. Hundreds of country boats, each with a Yamaha-Suzuki motor fitted on its side like a tourist's money belt, wait on the shore or are out at sea. It is like a medieval carnival. Thousands of fishermen congregate on this beach, having come in small trucks with their heavy nets from various parts of Kerala. That year (1998) two chakara had formed, one at Vallanja Kuzhi or Vandanam, 10 kms from Alapuzha, another at Chendavelli, 25 kms further to the North.

A market has come up, but since there are few women and children and nobody with leisure and money to spend, it is a functional market – food stalls, a merchant with a few lengths of cloth. The food is not much, only tea and bananas fried in batter. Part of the reason may be that the fishermen can't keep the food down when they go to sea. The sea makes them vomit. Tīlak, a young man who took to fishing because of an inability to hold any other job said, 'The first six months were terrible. I vomited all the time. I would be hungry and tell my mother to fry me some good fish, but when I saw it I couldn't eat.'

Another young man called Lal Gerga said, 'I went to the sea for nine days and I couldn't stand it though my father was a *malsya thozhilali*. The smell of machine oil made me sick. I had no fear, just that I couldn't adjust to the vomiting.' Peter Thayil, how-

ever, argues that the government must provide nutritious and subsidised food for the fisherpeople at these markets.

The beach at the chakara teems with men in the prime of life, between the ages of 20 and 50. The older men help transferring of fish from the nets to the basket. An old man called out, 'Tell her to write how my hands hurt when I do this work, how the fins prick my hands like thorns.' One of the younger fishermen showed me his hands – there was salt, sand and small deep holes. 'The only medicine we apply is salt water. If a fisherman goes to the hospital he is told to wait at the door. After all, why should they care? They are the sons and daughters of trawler owners and MPs. No pension, no gratuity and no health care.'

**O**ne of the greatest paradoxes for the fishermen is how to juggle between *thozhiuyil* and *varumanam*, labour and income. If the catch is good they can make several thousands. If they catch nothing they slip into debt. It is this oscillation between hope and despair that we need to understand when looking at subsistence societies.

Fr. Anthony Jacob spearheads the movement in Alapuzha. He said, 'On the one hand the movement gets its dynamism from the fisherpeople's attachment to the Church. Its good that they uphold the values of the Church, but I personally do not think they should depend on the Church so much. Even if we say that the Church is part of the world, it nevertheless is a spiritual place. Yet, we know we have to be part of the world, of human struggles.'

'El Salvador or some other countries in South America have a different context. The Church has a different role there – fundamentally oriented toward human liberation. It is a different struggle there. Here the people have freedom. There the sacrifices are

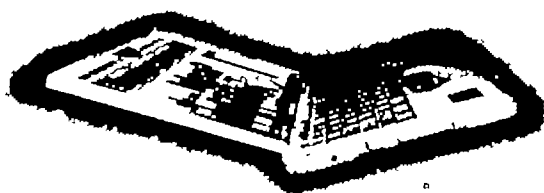
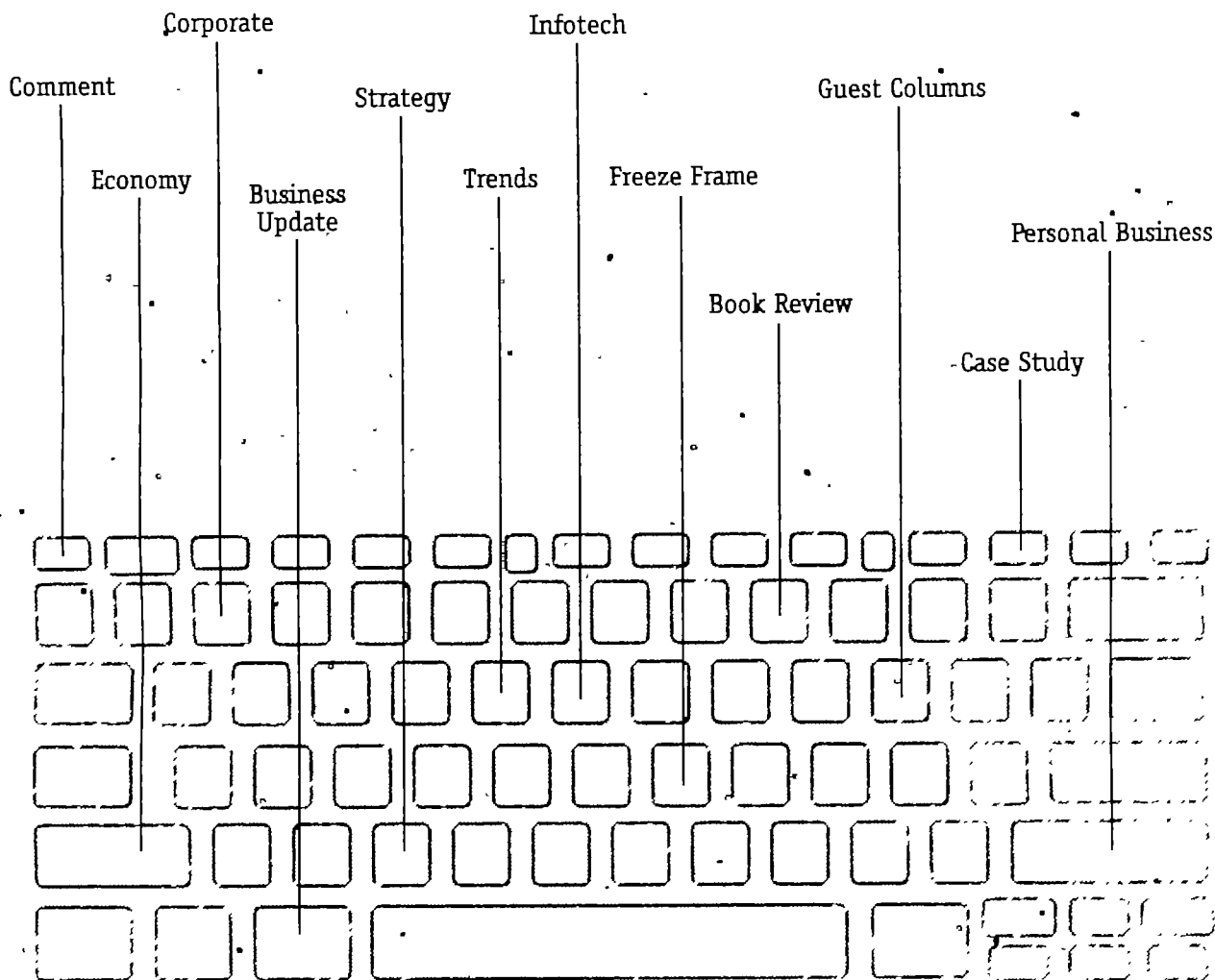
different, an ordinary man may not dare what the priests do.

'Our role as a Church is a promoting agency. We can initiate the process which the local leadership can take up. If not, this will lead to the coalition of religion and politics. The young are becoming more and more orthodox, and the Church must make clear that the people have freedom to organise.

'The dilemma of overfishing is a natural outcome – it will happen to any sector where there is no transformation of occupation. Vellapally Thumpolly and Omanapurram were once fishing villages but are now in the coir sector. This has happened in the recent past. We are trying to develop the coir industry as an alternative. Handspinning is the oldest method, where the worker receives upto Rs 10 a day. On a wooden or a motorised *ratt*, which the Church can provide loans towards, they can earn more, perhaps Rs 25 a day.'

Fr. Antony is clear that the Church has to function less as a charity and more as an enabling organisation. The problem lies in that the Church in India has no power, it cannot oppose any government coming into power for it is largely dependent on foreign funds. And the first thing that Antony Jacob says is that the success of the movement depends on learning from mistakes and understanding the play of power in union politics. 'Who wants to give up power? Some of the priests want power. But we must give up that power. Like Moses I must walk away into the wilderness.' If I wanted power and fame and money the fisherpeople's struggle is not where I should be.

Like in all people's movements, events swirl and shift and change from one summer to another. The role of the anthropologist is clearly to record these nuances of difference, so that a change in direction of the struggle may be notated.



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# Violating India's natural treasures

VALMIK THAPAR

AS we near the end of the century, it is disturbing how over the years, but especially in the last decade, big business interests in India have exploited our natural resources. This has been done with impunity, regardless of the laws that govern the land. Every state has experienced its share of violations. The tragedy is that the great profit-makers have not put even one rupee back, either to reclaim land that has been damaged or in mitigative measures that could help the environment.

Let us look at the case of dams and mines in Madhav national park in Madhya Pradesh. A request was made by the state authorities to release 3,000 hectares of forest land for a hydroelectric project from the Shivpuri forest division. The proposal was examined and cleared by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests through the Forest Conservation Act Advisory Committee. After all, the original application for clearance clearly stated that the chief wildlife warden of the state considered the area to have no wild-

life of any significance in 1994. Further, the divisional forest officer had recommended the diversion, even though the value of trees listed was to the tune of Rs 5 crore.

But, the matter was more serious since these were official comments regarding a national park. The land in question included a portion of Madhav national park. The state government, instead of clarifying this in its original application, had only stated 'Shivpuri forest division', and the legal status as 'PF and RF' (protected forest and reserved forest). No mention of the national park was made! Little did the central government realise that 1,500 hectares of this land had earlier been notified as Madhav national park. The MOEF tried to stop the release only when this fact was brought to their notice.

In a letter addressed to me, the Director of Wildlife Preservation [or Additional IGF (wildlife)] wrote, 'It is revealed that the permission granted for transfer of forest land for Sindh, Mohini Sagar phase II hydroelectric

project was obtained by the Madhya Pradesh government without informing that the land forms part of the national park. Once it came to the notice of the central government that the land proposed for transfer is within the national park, the project was rejected and the state government was asked to fix up the responsibility against the erring official.'

But the GOI had been misled and in the intervening period the irrigation project had spent more than Rs 80 crore, damaging the forest land in question along with 5,00,000 trees. Even today the state government is indifferent to the central government ban on the Sindh phase II project, and continues work in the national park and forest land. A serious violation of the law that governs our natural heritage had been detected, but to what avail?

In the same Shivpuri forest division, other violations resulting from the permission to mine inside the national park have further degraded both forest and wildlife in the area. Strong objection was voiced against the permission given by the ministry to operate seven mines inside the Madhav national park. This area also formed part of the land being released for the dam. In a clever usage of words, both the state government and the MOEF refer to this land as the 'proposed extension area of Madhav national park.' Someone in the corridors of power had ingeniously coined a new phrase; there is no such thing as a proposed extension area of a national park.

The objection to the mining was based on a letter from the ministry dated December 1995 regarding: '(i) Renewal of mining lease over an area of 930,734 ha of forest land in district Shivpuri. (ii) Permission for removal of existing material and

completion of mining operations in the forest areas already broken up in respect of seven mines within the proposed extension area of Madhav national park.'

It refers to the M.P. chief minister's, DO letter no.4337/CMS/95 dated 1.11.95 addressed to the minister (environment and forests) regarding the above mentioned subject and states that as a very special case, the ministry had decided to grant permission upto 31 March 1996, only for removal of existing material and completion of mining operations in the forest areas already broken up in respect of seven mines within the proposed extension area of Madhav national park. This was subject to the condition that the state government would relocate the mines outside the national park in the alternative areas within the period of this temporary permission.

'It is requested that during the period of temporary permission, the concerned officials may be directed to keep a strict vigil so that no fresh forest area is broken up during this period. It will be pertinent to mention here that regional office, Bhopal vide letter addressed to chief conservator of forests (land management and FC), government of Madhya Pradesh, has pointed out that mining activities were being continued in some fresh forest areas which were not broken up earlier. This should not have been allowed to recur. It is also clarified that no further extension of temporary working permission from the state government will be entertained in future.'

Under no existing law in the country could the above clearance have been given. The ministry had no power under law to grant any permission 'for removal of material from a national park', but they did it. It is obvious that there was a strong con-

nection between the lessees of the mines and powerful politicians. And, believe it or not, the 'special permission' continued. This is indicated in a letter dated 14 May 1996, which states that: 'As a very special case this ministry has decided to grant permission upto 30th June 1996.' Only in 1997 did the mining stop after the area was totally devastated. How could the central government have issued such orders and under which law?

The IG (forests) in the ministry replied as follows to the objection: 'The decision to grant temporary working permission upto June 1996 in respect of seven mines located in the proposed extension area of Madhav national park has been taken after careful examination of all the issues including hardship to local labourers engaged in the mines. It will be pertinent to mention that this permission is only for removal of existing material and completion of mining operations over already broken up forest area and more importantly subject to the condition of relocation of these mines outside the national park within this period, so that the interest of the wildlife and labourers employed in these quarries can be safeguarded simultaneously.' Unbelievable.

In a letter to the IG (forests) it was clarified that as the area was reserve forest, national park land, it was illegal for the ministry to allow mining or removal of materials irrespective of the feelings of the labourers. Also, if the feelings of the labourers working in illegal mines were so important, the ministry should have found alternative employment schemes for them. There was no further reply.

Everyone has sought refuge in the grey areas of the Wildlife Protection Act to suit their own needs. What they forgot was the law and the fact that Madhav national park was cons-

stituted under section 35, which states: '35. Declaration of national park – (i) Whenever it appears to the state government that an area, whether within a sanctuary or not, is, by reason of its ecological, fauna, flora, geomorphological, or zoological association or importance, needed to be constituted as a national park for the purpose of protecting, propagating or developing wildlife therein or its environment, it may, by notification, declare its intention to constitute such areas as a national park.' And after declaring its intention, 35(5) of the Act states: 'No alteration of the boundaries of a national park shall be made except on a resolution passed by the legislature of the state.'

Within months, the chief wildlife warden of M.P. under enormous pressure and irrespective of the Wildlife Protection Act stated, 'The exclusion of the submergence area from the national park will not have any adverse affect on wildlife conservation.' A letter from the director of the park was also released along the same lines.

**B**y the end of 1998, the Madhav case became even more interesting with an MP and general secretary of the AICC writing to the minister of environment and forests on 26 May 1998 asking for a reconsideration of the Mohini Sagar proposal. In his reply of 20 October 1998 the minister stated, 'The issue of reconsideration of this proposal has been examined in detail by the ministry, including the forest advisory committee. After examination of the proposal, the ministry has taken a view that a final decision on the proposal will be taken only after the settlement proceedings have been completed and final notification issued under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, in respect of the extension area of national park. You may also like to take up the matter with the state

government to expedite the said process of issue of final notification.'

**B**y 16 November 1998, the general secretary of the Congress, using an AICC letterhead, wrote to the chief minister of Madhya Pradesh: 'I am enclosing herewith a copy of the letter received from Shri Suresh Prabhu, Minister for Environment and Forests, GOI, New Delhi, which is self-explanatory. I shall be grateful if you could expedite this matter with the forest department officials of the state government. It is requested that you may kindly keep me informed of the progress in this regard.'

Why were those involved so interested in releasing land from Madhav national park and without approval from the legislative assembly? Was it because the mines fell in the same area as the irrigation project?

The 'word games' did not clarify that the so-called submergence area was already notified in the first instance as a national park, and was a reserved forest area. Based on these letters, the court of the sub-divisional officer (SDO) revenue in Shivpuri district, passed an order on 18 March 1999, excluding 2062.05 hectares of land from Madhav national park which fell on the western bank of the Sindh river. Legal opinion suggests that the SDO did not have the authority to do this because the land was reserve forest. But once again the act has been used to 'take away' rather than protect.

Take another case. One of Madhya Pradesh's protected areas, the Gangau sanctuary, 'vanished' from the list of protected areas for more than 10 years. When this was discovered, a massive effort went into putting it back onto the list. But after surveying the site of this sanctuary, I was horrified to discover a huge diamond mining establishment based inside the

area, as also scores of white sandstone quarries dotting the entire landscape of the sanctuary.

The Gangau sanctuary today covers 69 sq km and acts as a vital buffer for the Panna national park and tiger reserve. The area was notified as a sanctuary on 13 November 1975 by the Government of Madhya Pradesh (no. 5248-3273-DAS(2)75). Subsequently, the government forgot about it and turned a blind eye to the many violations of the Wildlife Protection Act. Today, after being pounded by mining, the sanctuary lies in four fragmented bits. It has still not been brought under the administrative control of the chief wildlife warden and is looked after by the divisional forest officer of North Panna forest division.

**I**n 1996 the district collector started the process of final notification by inviting claims for the settlement of rights but for reasons unknown never completed this process. In fact, in total violation of all sections of the Wildlife Protection Act, the district collector of Panna has sanctioned leases for the mining of white sandstone on forest land, inside the area of the sanctuary. There are conflicting claims about the status of the land between the revenue and the forest departments. The possibility exists that revenue records were tampered with in order to change  *khasra*  or survey numbers, so that mining could commence.

Some of the better-known mining sanctions occupy more than 15 hectares in four forest compartments, 543, 278, P273 and P259 sanctioned in 1987, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995 and 1998. Near Badour village, all the stream beds and *nallahs* have also been mined. Even though it has been clearly brought to the revenue department's notice that under the law they cannot issue such sanctions, they have

refused to cooperate with the forest department. Local courts have also given favourable judgements to some miners irrespective of the acts or rulings in the Supreme Court on these issues. The areas being torn apart could be more than five times what was originally sanctioned.

During the year 1998-1999, more than 20 new leases were sanctioned by the district collector and state government for an area larger than 50 hectares. Such serious violations of the law have been frequent and without clearance from the forest department. What is even more shocking is that though senior officers of the forest department have confronted the district collector of Panna and the commissioner of Sagar division about the existence of the sanctuary, along with government notifications and maps of the area, they have taken little notice and Gangau sanctuary has been turned into a haven for mining.

**O**n top of all this white sandstone mining is the case of the National Minerals Development Corporation (NMDC) at Majhgawan, whose 20 year old lease to mine diamonds expired in 1990. Of course, mining continued and it was only in January 1999 that the GOI finally called a halt. The infrastructure, establishment and mining sites spread over several hundred hectares of the Gangau sanctuary are in total violation of the law. Hectic meetings took place in May between mining and forest officials to find a way to continue illegal diamond mining. As recently as 1996 a new colony for the staff was built inside Gangau sanctuary in violation of the Wildlife Protection Act.

The effluents from diamond mining have found their way into the Panna national park and tiger reserve, polluting the natural water bodies inside the protected area in clear vio-

lation of the Environment Protection Act. Huge dumps of mining waste and garbage stretch 10 meters into the sky near the entrance to the national park and on forest land which is part of the sanctuary. Of course, there are other examples across the protected area network in India, but Gangau must surely be a prime example of how a sanctuary can be destroyed and by the state government. Hundreds of crores have been made from this area in the last few years.

**N**umerous mining leases for iron ore have plagued the natural wilderness of Goa, leaving its surface looking like a bombed out crater. In the north Goa forest division, immediately adjacent to or often inside the Bhagwan Mahaveer wildlife sanctuary, several mining leases encroach on the sanctuary or impact on its borders. The mining lobby in Goa is so powerful that it dictates administrative decision-making.

Take the case of the Molem national park, Bhagwan Mahaveer sanctuary and the other protected areas of Goa. Though over the years, Goa has been a major tourist destination for its sun, sand and the sea, little is known of its forests and protected areas. The few who traverse the coastline rarely realise that some miles away lie the superb forests of the Western Ghats, traversing some 1,200 sq km out of which nearly 740 sq km is now protected.

The Bhagwan Mahaveer wildlife sanctuary and Molem national park cover a total area of 240 sq km of moist deciduous, semi-evergreen and evergreen forests. The area boasts of a rich diversity of fauna including the tiger. Occasionally even black leopards are sighted. This superb area has suffered because of an absence of political will to treasure it. In 1985, 19 sq km of protected area was denoti-

fied, probably to permit some private land holdings and future mining concessions. There is a proposal to denotify another 16 sq km.

Recently, the Netravalli sanctuary has been notified which will adjoin this area on one side covering an area of 200 sq km and Madei sanctuary on the other, also to cover an equal area. If this comes through, Goa will be one of the few states in India to cover its entire stretch of forests in the Western Ghats as a protected area. Also connected through a forest patch is the tiny Bondla wildlife sanctuary. At the far end of Goa's forests, Cotigao sanctuary hugs the border with Karnataka and even a part of Dandeli sanctuary of Karnataka touches Goa. This provides a vital corridor for tigers—from Maharashtra to Goa to Karnataka. But for how long?

**I**t is a crying shame that the political and business leadership in Goa, and the Ministry of Environment and Forests, have not sorted out the horrible devastation being caused by manganese and iron ore mining. At least 100-150 large mines are operating in a 10 km radius of the protected areas, defacing not just the Western Ghats but pumping a toxic cocktail of effluents into the river systems of Goa, such as the Mahdei river.

Mining nets nearly Rs 900 crore each year for private industry. The revenue received by government is barely Rs 10 crore. Recently, the government requested the Tata Energy Research Institute to prepare an 'areawide environmental quality management plan.' The report makes it clear that around 21,000 hectares of private and forest land, which accounts for at least 18% of Goa's private and government forest, has been lost due to mining. The air quality around the mining areas is terrible. The dust fall rate is also much higher than prescribed. As

a result, the prevalence of disease in these areas has increased.

The endless discharges have created heavy turbidity making the water unfit for drinking. The high concentration of dissolved solids increases the electrical conductivity of the water making it unfit for irrigation and 320 hectares of land has silted over. The run-off from the mining dumps, pit water discharges and tailing pond overflow accounts for most of the sediment load in rivers, streams and nallahs. At least 70,000 tonnes of run-off material are dumped in the Mandovi river. Each mine also releases 100-250 kg of grease into the water bodies. The worst affected rivers are the Mandovi, Bicholim and Khandepar, all with huge mining dumps situated on their banks.

This is the most serious case of violation of the Environment Protection Act in India. The mining industry, particularly the six giants, earn more than 900 crore every year. Not a rupee goes back to the protection of the environment. Goa will end up with a fate far worse than death as its forests are mined out and blasted, water systems turn toxic and beaches become large garbage dumps. The laws that have been enacted must be enforced by the MOEF and the state government made responsible.

Let us now move onto Rajasthan and the fate of the Jamua Ramgarh wildlife sanctuary. Way back in May 1982, it was notified that all forest land was reserved forest, yet both state and central governments, in total violation of the law, continue to renew mining leases. The two more recent renewals are by the MOEF. In a letter dated 21 January 1998 the ministry wrote about the 'Diversion of 401.812 ha of forest land for mining in favour of 37 mine owners in Jaipur West District. After careful consideration of the proposal

of the state government the central government hereby gives approval for a diversion of 390.524 ha in favour of 34 mine owners for a period of two years only. The state government must ensure the closure of the mining operation in the area within two years and an interim report on the action taken to ensure this may be sent after one year.'

Not stated in the letter is the fact that the leases are part of the sanctuary. It only mentions the area as 'Jaipur West district' and cleverly states that operations should cease by 21.1.2000, as if the sanctioning authority was aware of having broken the law.

Large sections of Jamua Ramgarh are completely devastated by mining with at least 12 sq km wiped out and another 10 sq km seriously affected. At least Rs 500 crore of minerals are plundered and sold each year. Mining has pillaged the beauty of this area, including inside the water body, contravening all the laws of the land. Leases for soapstone mining have blocked vital wildlife migratory routes.

Jamua Ramgarh is reflective of the state of the unknown and unvisited sanctuaries of India. Violated, plundered and bombed-out by mines in contravention of the laws; worse, the central and state governments are a party to these violations. It is a shocking story of wildlife governance where the well-known parks become showpieces while the rest are neglected and violated. Does the mining of our forests and protected areas pay for elections? Does it line the pockets of politicians and bureaucrats? Is it such a powerful lobby that no court or law dare stand in its way?

Today, around 2000 mining leases and quarry licenses are destroying more than 75,000 hectares of Rajasthan's tiny forest cover. Add to that 5,300 sawmills that account for 468,503 cu metres each year. Rajas-

than has only around 3% of forest cover left – dense forest accounts for 3,500 sq kms and open forest about 9,000 sq kms. That even this tiny area is plundered is indeed a tragedy. What does the Wildlife Protection Act say about sanctuaries like Jamua Ramgarh? According to Section 29: 'No person shall destroy, exploit or remove any wildlife from a sanctuary or destroy or damage the habitat of any wild animal or its habitat within a sanctuary ..' And what are we doing?

The wild ass sanctuary in the Little Rann of Kutch is a fascinating wilderness area. It is unique and more than a mere world heritage site. Every monsoon the desert welcomes the sea and large portions become breeding grounds for crustaceans and millions of flamingos and other migratory birds who come to feast and breed. It is also the only home of the wild ass. In 1973, 4,953 sq km of this vast, flat, salt-cracked area was declared a sanctuary, one of the largest in Asia. It is estimated to have 2,000 wild ass endemic to this area and a host of other species of wildlife, at least 253 species of flowering plants, 167 species of algae, 93 species of invertebrate including 27 species of spiders, 4 species of amphibians, 29 species of reptiles, 22 species of fish, 81 species of terrestrial birds, 97 species of water birds, 61 species of mammals. But tragically, given its unique nature, it is a vast repository of salt as well.

A local NGO, the Dhrangadhra Prakrati Mandal, approached the court in 1996 to save the region from excessive exploitation. They stated, 'In the last few months some powerful vested interests in the salt industry as well as in the government are demanding and actively pressurising the government to denotify the sanctuary. Demand for new land for salt manufacturing increases day by day and because of

these encroachments the wild ass enters the crop lands. The Little Rann of Kutch is unique and the most complete desert on earth and it is now feared that this last abode of the Indian wild ass will fall prey in the hands of short-sighted politicians and industrialists. The whole sanctuary with its delicate ecosystem stands degraded, more so as the days go by. With every norm violated, the sanctuary is falling apart and is likely to become a crematorium for wildlife.'

**T**he petitioners further stated that between 1985 to 1990 the salt pan area in the sanctuary increased from 2,479 hectares to 39,955 hectares. The 1990 figure has now tripled! And they are not wrong. The sanctuary accounts for 20% of the total salt production of India and 50,000 people illegally work inside the sanctuary. At least 2,500 trucks ply back and forth every day taking out salt. Every rule of the Wildlife Protection Act has been violated; more than 1000 sq km of the sanctuary area is being mined for salt.

Before the sanctuary was notified there were only 203 licensed mines over 166 sq kms. After the entire area was notified as a sanctuary another 1448 mining licenses were given over 294 sq kms of the sanctuary, and today nearly 1,700 mines operate legally on 460 sq kms inside the sanctuary. The new leases were given by the revenue department flouting the Wildlife Protection Act.

Let's look at what else afflicts this unique ecosystem. When the sea comes into the sanctuary, an army of shrimp catchers illegally enter and exploit the area. Nearly 1,800 boats with 9,000 fishermen use the area between July and September and catch at least 5,000 tonnes of fish which retail at a minimum price of Rs 60-100 crore each year. It is not unusual to see refrigerated trucks parked at the edge of the

sanctuary waiting to transport the catch. 11 species of prawn and 22 species of fish are caught, 95% of it prawns. A total population of 70,000 fisherfolk live around the sanctuary.

Chemical factories are bunched in a 20 km radius of the sanctuary, pumping out an enormous amount of untreated hazardous effluents and toxic waste. A soda ash chemical factory in the area pipes its effluents into an open gutter on the edge of the Falku river, 2.8 km from the sanctuary's boundary. In 1987, villages from the area went to the high court who ordered the company to shift the pipeline since it had severely damaged vegetation and the underground water table causing serious health hazards. Finally, the pipeline was reportedly located 0.6 km from the boundary of the sanctuary and everyone rushed to give their 'no objection' to this.

On a visit to the site of the discharge, I found that it was still clearly inside the sanctuary. A small 'lake of effluents' had been created destroying vegetation and making it uninhabitable to wildlife. It had become a dumping ground for toxic wastes.

**R**epeated attempts have been made by district collectors and the revenue department to lease out sanctuary land for salt mining, thereby violating the Forest Conservation Act and Wildlife Protection Act of India. Clearly, the revenue department plays games with land records in order to provide leases. If that is not bad enough, the Indian Army has leased out an area of nearly 250 sq kms of this sanctuary for field-firing exercises under the Armies Field Firing and Artillery Practice Act, 1939. The area for the army was notified by the Gujarat government in December 1969 for a period of 30 years. Once the sanctuary came into being, the land was notified in 1979. In 1985 the chief

wildlife warden of Gujarat noted in a letter to the secretary of forests: 'As this area is situated in the little Rann of Kutch and is within the wild ass sanctuary area, the disturbances and the detrimental effects to the rare species are being noticed. It is seen that at times the firing kills the asses or maims them. In many instances the wild asses die due to noise and fear and run away ..' He tried hard to persuade the Defence Ministry to move the firing range outside the sanctuary but in vain. The firing goes on.

**C**onsider the case of the Gir lion, the Kankei temple and the cement factories of Saurashtra. Gir is not only the last home of the Asiatic lion, it is one of the last remaining contiguous tracts of forest that encompasses 1800 sq kms in Gujarat. It is a vital water catchment; seven rivers flow through it to the coastline some 50 kms away. It is also home to the richest vein of limestone deposits in the country.

The limestone in the area attracts a totally different creature—the Indian businessman, who is totally insensitive to the laws that govern our natural heritage. The area around Gir right up to the coastline has attracted the cement and soda ash industry which has located its factories in the middle of the limestone veins so that the raw material is close by. Super skilled teams of land buyers move in, gobbling up more and more land and jetties rush out to the sea to receive materials like coal and export finished products like cement. Effluents are piped a few hundred metres into the sea to unload their toxic cocktail on our marine ecosystems, depleting an ever diminishing marine life. Some ports like Veraval do business worth \$150 million each year. The coastline in the area around Gir national park accounts for another \$150 million each year from cement and soda ash.

The limestone land gobblers play endless games with the boundary of the Gir park, mining every bit of available land adjacent to the protected area (and sometimes within it if the boundary is unclear). A recent study (August 1998) pointed to over 100 mines within a 10 km radius of the protected area. These feed seven cement factories and one soda ash plant owned by some of the biggest names in Indian business. So far, not a rupee has been spent by big business for lion protection or on wildlife development in these mine-blasted, pock-marked, crater-scarred land of the lion. Everyone is into making a quick buck.

**T**he situation is no better in Karnataka. Many serious violations of the Wildlife Protection Act have been permitted in the Kudremukh national park. The Kudremukh Iron Ore Corporation (KIOCL), which is already mining in the heart of the national park, is relentlessly moving into new areas and pushing for new leases. The present lease was given before the Wildlife Protection Act came into being, but let's look at some of the details and the games forest officers play.

Mining by KIOCL for iron ore in the area is based on mining lease no. 909 dated 25 July 1969 which expired on 24 July 1999 (now renewed). When KIOCL approached the state government for an extension of the aforementioned mining lease for a further period (based on a letter application on 4 June 1998, and not a detailed proposal as should have been the case), the opinion of the chief wildlife warden was sought as per procedure. He opposed the extension of the mining lease in his unofficial note no. DM-WL-CR-74/98-99 dated 17 March 1999 to the principal chief conservator of forest (PCCF), a note prepared after nine months of investigation into the compliance record of the company. It

stated that were mining to continue in the region, consequences to wildlife and forests would be disastrous, especially in Kudremukh national park and the Bhadra wildlife sanctuary (now Bhadra tiger reserve).

**I**n his letter no. A5 (B1)MNG.CR.66/91-92 dated 3 July 1999, the principal chief conservator of forest, Karnataka, wrote to the principal forest secretary recommending a temporary extension of mining lease to KIOCL for a period of two years. He also expressed the need for a comprehensive review of environmental impact due to mining by KIOCL in the region to be conducted by the National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI) and the Wildlife Institute of India (WII). The PCCF also communicated the concerns of the chief wildlife warden about extending the mining lease.

The record of KIOCL throughout the 30 year period they have mined in the Kudremukh national park has been abysmal, both in terms of compliance of law and as well in undertaking environmental protection measures. There are further violations that have taken place in this area – illegal forest felling, road building and drilling activities in preparation for mining within the Nellibeedu area of the Kudremukh national park (over 310 hectares), causing the submergence of 340 hectares of forest by the illegal increase in height of the Lakya Tailings dam. More recently, roads have been built in the Kachigehole valley in preparation for a second tailings storage/water supply dam.

Days before the Kudremukh lease was to expire, the minister and MOEF came under great pressure from the senior-most politicians of Karnataka and they granted a temporary one year extension to KIOCL. Legal opinion suggests that this was in complete violation of the sections and provi-

sions of the country's Act. When the chief wildlife warden, who is the critical functionary under the Wildlife Protection Act, rejects a mining lease from within the national park, no senior officer or state government can recommend the case, nor can the central government clear it. Yet this is precisely what happened.

There are at least 100 protected areas that suffer due to mining on their boundaries or within the protected area itself. Because boundary demarcations are so vague, many mines have encroached. In several cases their effluents have been poured into the water systems, rivers and streams, seriously polluting them. The first priority has to be to remove mining from our protected area system, since under the Wildlife Protection Act it is an illegal activity. But who on earth will ever do this?

**A**s this century comes to a close, it is a matter of regret that some of our most profitable industries have seriously impacted on the environment causing permanent damage. It has adversely affected the lives of the people – be it through the air they breathe or the water they drink. An environmental catastrophe is about to tear this country apart and millions will suffer. We have detailed only a few examples of the horrors that afflict the land of the tiger. It is clear that while big business has made thousands of crores, not even a paise has been ploughed back. Also, that all the laws that govern the natural heritage of this country have been used and abused as governments have watched silently. The list of horrors is much longer and only a reform and restructuring of our legal and enforcement mechanisms can help undo some of the havoc that has been created. We must act now to prevent the disasters that await us in the next millennium.

# Four stories and a question

RAJNI BAKSHI

- \* George Soros, a multi-billionaire philanthropist and the most successful money manager of our times, writes and campaigns passionately against 'market-fundamentalism'.

- \* Over a thousand people from different corners of India meet for the third Congress of Traditional Sciences and Technologies of India at Varanasi.

- \* Bruce Sterling, a science fiction writer, addresses the Industrial Designers Society of America in Chicago and throws them the Viridian challenge.

- \* Domkhedi, a small village on the banks of the Narmada, anchors a dogged satyagraha.

These apparently unrelated events have occurred in the last one year. Each of them is rooted in the urge to make the world a better place. Here are different dimensions of coping with, and even daring to direct, juggernaut forces of change. Are there creative possibilities tucked away in the intersecting common spaces of these diverse settings?

George Soros, a Hungarian born American billionaire, has so far been known as the most successful money manager of our times. Over the last four decades, his international investment fund has amassed a fortune of

over \$20 billion. Soros has often been credited for triggering vast swings in the world currency markets. He is probably the only man who almost busted the Bank of England. Since the late 1980s, Soros has also been in the news for giving away millions of dollars through his Open Society Foundations.

However, last year Soros made headlines by earning ridicule for his book, *Crisis of Global Capitalism: Open Society Endangered* (Public Affairs, New York, 1998). In this book Soros argues that the global capitalist system, which has been responsible for the remarkable prosperity of the USA, is coming apart at the seams. He warns that the financial meltdown in Russia and the crises of the Asian economies are the portends of much worse still to come.

Lest he be mistaken for changing sides, Soros is quick to point out, at the very outset, that he is not trying to abolish the global capitalist system, for it is better than the tried alternatives. Instead he is campaigning for reform which will prevent the system from destroying itself. Yet, as the *Wall Street Journal* noted, Soros' rhetoric recalls the treatises of Marx and Lenin more than the musings of a modern-



day financial wizard. Soros writes, for example, that:

- \* Open society is no longer endangered by totalitarian regimes but instead by the lack of social cohesion and the absence of government.

- \* Financial markets resent any kind of government interference but they hold a belief deep down that if conditions get really tough the authorities will step in. This belief has now been shaken.

- \* There is a need to recognise that markets are inherently unstable and thus imposing market discipline means imposing instability. How much instability can society take?

- \* The failures of politics are much more pervasive and debilitating than the failures of the market mechanism. The disenchantment with politics has fed market fundamentalism which, in turn, has contributed to the failure of politics.

- \* The term 'market fundamentalism' refers to a mind-set which holds that all social activities and human interactions should be looked at as transactional, contract-based relationships and valued in terms of a single common denominator, money. This mind-set now poses a greater threat to open society than any totalitarian ideology.

- \* How society should be organised, how people ought to live their lives – these questions ought not to be answered on the basis of market values. Yet... market fundamentalists have transformed an axiomatic, value-neutral theory into an ideology which has influenced political and business behaviour in a powerful and dangerous way.

- \* While communism and even socialism have been discredited, the belief in laissez faire capitalism has elevated the deficiency of social values into a moral principle.

- \* There is a common flaw in market fundamentalism, geopolitical realism and vulgar social Darwinism: the dis-

regard of altruism and cooperation.

- \* Open society can only be defended by people learning (or remembering) to distinguish between what is right and what is expedient and doing what is right even if it is not expedient. This is a tall order. It cannot be justified by a calculation of narrow self-interest.

- \* A global open society cannot be brought into existence by people or non-governmental organizations acting on their own. Sovereign states have to cooperate and this requires political action. Public opinion and civil society have an important role to play in this process.

These observations and conclusions do sound more like the pronouncements of a left-wing anti-globalisation activist than 'the most successful money manager of our times.' And that is how Soros' pronouncements have been treated. His book was quite uniformly trashed by the mainstream media in the USA, with most of the above points being overlooked or rejected in a facile manner.

**M**ost media attention was focused on the contradictions between Soros' money-making methods and his social concerns. 'When Soros the speculator forces a currency into crisis, what does Soros the philanthropist think?' asked the headline of an article in *Foreign Affairs*. Most reviewers echoed the *Wall Street Journal's* verdict that 'Mr Soros' diagnosis of global capitalism has more flaws than the system itself.'

Thus, suddenly, a financial wizard, a man at the very heart of the mainstream, seems like a rebel at the margins. It is another matter that Soros may not be welcomed by those who are used to working at the margins, having been there a life-time. The critique outlined above has been tirelessly reiterated by them for decades. Yet many of them may not pause to

consider Soros' stand seriously, for they would tend to agree with *The New York Times'* verdict about Soros: 'He's seen the enemy. It looks like him.'

But this response eliminates any possibility of building further, both on the critique itself and the fact that Soros is articulating it. Surely there must be some people, in different corners of the global marketplace of ideas, who are willing to expand the space – or even promise of space – opened up by Soros' stand. This would mean a willingness to dialogue and reach across both apparent divides and familiar stereotypes. This itself may be a much tougher challenge than the dangers of market fundamentalism.

**F**or sheer contrast let us now switch to the next story from the other end of the spectrum about a very different kind of 'worried about globalisation' fraternity. At just about the same time that Soros' book was rolling off the press in America, a segment of this fraternity was assembling along the banks of the Ganga, at Varanasi.

The third Congress on Traditional Sciences and Technologies of India and Soros' world are virtually planets apart. They seem to exist in a time-space dimension almost exclusive of each other. The concrete canyons of Wall Street and the muddles of currency trading are indeed far, far away from the world of a weaver scrambling for raw materials or a bamboo craftsman seeking a toe-hold in the local market. Let us, just for the moment, overlook the claim that distances can now be dissolved by a few 'clicks' on the world wide web. And then, let us briefly glimpse the six-day Congress.

The traditional science congress' are mixed gatherings of the converted. All participants share a skepticism about modern modes and

are interested in the traditional knowledge systems. But this common denominator covers a wide variety of perspectives. There are those who comprehensively denounce the modern industrial project as an unmitigated disaster and believe that a revival of traditional modes of production and resource use would set the world right. Others take a tempered view of both modern and traditional systems and aspire for a utilitarian mix. Yet others are seeking to grasp the essential wisdom of the ages and make a civilizational 'leap' that would elevate human society to a higher level of evolution.

The Patriotic and People oriented Science and Technology (PPST) Foundation, which initiated and coordinates the Congress', is itself a mixed group. Its formal position is a response to the fact that modern modes of industry and development have failed to deliver even the bare minimum basics to the bulk of Indians. Thus the need to explore the contemporary relevance of 'living' traditional systems of knowledge, modes of production and lifestyles. The PPST aims to do this by expanding the economic and political space for traditional practitioners and perspectives.

**L**ike the first two Congress', held at IIT Bombay and Anna University Chennai, the Varanasi event brought together traditional practitioners, modern technologists and political activists from varied spheres. There were sections on agriculture, industry, health, veterinary science, water, philosophy, social organisation, local markets, energy and lifestyles, globalisation, education and women's knowledge.

The gathering could have excited a newcomer interested in, or even merely curious about, the promise of traditional systems in contemporary

problem-solving. There was a wide array of information available in each field. Among other things you could learn about indigenous methods of rainfall prediction, organic pesticides, traditional methods of soil fertility management, the intricacies of *vastu*, revival of draught animal power, traditional methods of cataract surgery, the role of neem in public health care and so on.

The Congress is also a meeting point for many of the protest movements and *andolans* struggling against destructive 'development' projects or policies. Most of these movements are united by their vehement opposition to the current trend of globalisation which is concentrating power in the hands of large multinational corporations.

**M**any veterans of this process may have come away disappointed from the Varanasi Congress. There was an excess of repetitive 'description' and retelling of the problem. While in some sections participants got a sense of the debate moving forward, in others there was a depressing sense of floundering about in circles. For the veterans there was joy in a concentrated gathering of old friends and colleagues. But the high dropout rate of those who were active and vital participants at the first two Congress' signalled a shrinkage of the forum. The host group's efforts to mobilise traditional practitioners around Varanasi in large numbers produced fairly modest results.

Loud denouncements of globalisation took many different forms. But there was little attention given to if and how the various economic and technological 'givens' could be challenged. In the absence of this, much of the prescriptive interventions took the form of sad-looking wishful thinking. Perhaps it followed from this that

there was a glaring lack of urgency about the need to translate the micro-knowledge of various sections into a 'doable' macro vision and scheme.

**T**he almost deliberated lack of urgency seems to have broadly two justifications. One, that we need more time to evolve sufficiently solid alternatives with which to confront the 'mainstream'. That is, we are as yet not ready for the macro-challenge. The second view is that in any case the present hi-tech, greed and speed-driven model of development will eventually exhaust itself and the various alternative visions will then flower in the space thus vacated.

Let us now contrast this with a dramatically different voice from the other end of the world – the voice of a futurist. Here is a passionate rejection of the 'anything-goes, eclectic, postmodern' approach. It opposes any attempt to 'cut-and-paste from the debris of past trends' and is 'forward-looking and hi-tech'. Bruce Sterling is a science fiction writer and a self-professed futurist guru. Apart from having written several books – including *Involution Ocean*, *The Artificial Kid*, *Schismatrix* and *Holy Fire*, he is also editor of *Mirrorshades*, an Internet publication which claims to be the definitive document of the cyberpunk movement. Sterling is working the web to call for a high-tech 21st century cyber-Green movement called 'Viridian Green'.

His ideas recently surfaced within the activist fraternity in India through the email circuit. In an exhortation like speech before the Industrial Designers Society of America in July this year, Sterling described global eco-destruction as a design problem. The greenhouse effect, he argued, is a life threatening monster that we must battle now, not by trying to recreate some better past but by creating anew

—by constantly, imaginatively extending the realm of the possible.

In response, Sterling proposes a movement about 'creative people taking a moral stance and determined to make the 20th century obsolete across the board. Not by returning to an Amish life of the 17th century. I have no problem with the Amish — if you want to live like the Amish, that should be your privilege — but you can't make other people live that way without gulags, barbed wire and bayonets. That's not a productive design approach.'

The answer is: 'A new movement that knows what time it is, understands the great stakes at risk, and completely obliterates the crap techniques, crap approaches, crap methods, crap industries and crap consumer goods of the 20th century.'

This can be ensured by following certain Viridian principles. Among other things this means recognising that 'The Biological Isn't Logical—the living world grows irrationally through non-systemic, genetic exploration of niche possibilities, pruned back by natural selection and occasional natural disasters.'

The Viridian approach also aims to maximise the ways in which information technology can revolutionize our relationship with the physical world by replacing physical resources with information wherever possible. Thus with 'silicon mirco-mechanical systems, you can etch whole 20th century iron-bending factories into chips: gears, pistons, cogwheels, levers, screws, all computer controlled, and fully functional, and physically productive, and too small to see.'

Just what is 'Viridian'? The concept, Sterling confesses, is 'most imaginary, mostly vaporware.' The one certainty attached to this concept is that it is not a movement to create

a utopia. 'Anyone who tells you they want a utopia wants to put chains on the souls of your children. They want to deny history and strangle any unforeseen possibility.... We Viridians don't want to last forever... Our aim is to get co-opted as soon as possible and have our principles vanish into the everyday world of the 21st century's anonymous truisms.'

Therefore the Viridian concept 'doesn't pretend to discover eternal truths, or to last forever. It's a fully disposable ideology. Its heyday lasts maybe ten years. Then it becomes history, gracefully. Viridianism doesn't have to be torn apart, because it spontaneously decays and recycles itself. After its over, the culture has an entire new set of problems.... We have achieved the fabulous designer luxury of getting to the next serious problem. Because we didn't fry of heart stroke and end up in intensive care. We kicked the carbon habit and therefore we have a genuine future.'

But excess carbon is not the only thing that threatens futures.

The satyagraha at Domkhedi, on the banks of the Narmada, is an even more dire struggle to secure the future. And it is not just the future of the displaced that is at stake on the banks of the Narmada. The struggle of 'The Valley', of the 'River that Refuses to Die', now literally and metaphorically embodies the choices that will shape tomorrow for all of us. Of course, this is not a very popular view.

It is much easier to represent the Narmada imbroglio as a simple contest between good guys and bad guys, with the roles being interchangeable depending on one's vantage point. For those who live in Gujarat, coping with a daily trickle of water, the anti-dam activists are villains while the entire parched state of Gujarat is the victim. For those whose homes and lands are

being swept into the expanding reservoir of the dam, it is self-evident that anyone who supports further construction of the dam is an unqualified villain.

The campaign and multi dimensional struggle against the big dams on the Narmada is now over a decade old. Yet this massive effort has not succeeded in convincing enough people in Gujarat that the entire scheme is a fraud against them as much as it is an offense against the displaced. How is it a fraud against the beneficiaries? One, there may have been other ways of securing water from the sky, the ground and even from distant sources which would have cost far less money, time and created less displacement. And, two, the dam builders have themselves willfully broken the law at every stage, both with regard to environmental safeguards and rehabilitation of displaced people.

Thanks to the timely and laser-sharp intervention by Arundhati Roy, debate on these issues has now been revived after a dull lull of almost three years. Veteran activist and academic Gail Omvedt has enlivened the middle ground with a flurry of correspondence and articles in *The Hindu*. She has provided a brief history of the politics of water and argued that in most places exogenous water is essential. But Gail has also accused the Narmada Bachao Andolan of being 'eco-romanticists'.

This one charge offers at least a key-hole view to the real battle of ideas that underlies the Narmada struggle. Irrigation and dams are merely its foreground props. Those who stand accused as eco-romanticists have two options. They can either rail against this as an unjust denouncement. For romantics are generally disregarded as impractical, even irresponsible, dreamers. Or they could

wear the badge with honour and pride. After all, civilizations are shaped by those who dare to challenge prevailing notions of the 'practical' and thus expand the frontiers of the possible. By questioning the nature and modes of 'development' this is just what the NBA is doing. Naturally, the concept of a decentralised industrial economy which empowers local communities, seems unrealistic in a world where more and more power rests with large global corporations. Then it does seem ridiculous to challenge the Wall Street version of the ancient mechanism of 'markets'.

But unless you question these apparent 'givens', the Narmada struggle can indeed be mistaken for a squabble over a few hundred square miles of land and water.

**A**nd that is the intersecting common ground between these stories. In their own radically different ways, all these people are refusing to accept what is generally treated as an incontestable 'given'. Let us assume an inherent authenticity and sincerity in each case. Let the efficacy of the challenge posed by each remain an open-ended question. And let us also agree that there is always merit in having the simplicity and courage to shout out loud that 'the king has no clothes on'.

Still, there is little to be gained by putting these stories in one place for a facile celebration of their daring. They are far more instructive for showing us how, for the most part, we tend to live and work in tight compartments. The 'we' here refers to all of us who are engaged in struggles to challenge certain dominant modes of thought. 'We' are also those who are long accustomed to lamenting the marginalisation of humanitarian and egalitarian ideas.

It is easy, too easy, for us to dismiss Soros as 'the face of the enemy'

and Sterling as an irrelevant cyberpunk. We may have to work much harder to appreciate that here are other people who are posing a challenge from within to whatever is treated as 'given' at the close of the 20th century. Perhaps they are even doing it more effectively than us.

It would be comfortable to reiterate our vision of the ideal and then argue that neither Soros nor Sterling actually pose a challenge at all. They are only fighting for the survival of the sordid system which 'we' are trying to overturn, or at least transform. For there is considerable discomfort in actually working out how the cherished, pure ideals can be translated into reality.

These stories also tell us something about the fluid dynamic between the 'mainstream' and the 'margins'. Witness Soros' experience. He remains at the core of the global capitalist mainstream as the head of a multi billion dollar enterprise. However, his social and economic assessment and prescription cause him to be relegated to the margins.

**T**he issues and concerns articulated at the Varanasi Congress reflect the reality of millions of Indians. Yet even to the practitioners of traditional skills, the worldview projected by the Congress seems marginal, if not actually subservient, to the forces shaping their present and future.

And yet this equation between the margins and the power core does keep changing. It is often difficult to quantify just when, and how 'marginal' ideas spread and move closer into the core or mainstream. But there is no denying the reality of this historical process. The question is: are we willing to look for resonance, if not actual allies, in the most unlikely of places? Are we willing to look for possibilities anywhere?

# Ethics of humanitarianism

JAMES ORBINSKI

Your Majesties, your Highness, Members of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The people of Chechnya – and the people of Grozny – today and for more than three months, are enduring indiscriminate bombing by the Russian Army. For them humanitarian assistance is virtually unknown. It is the sick, the old and the infirm who cannot escape Grozny. While the dignity of people in crisis is so central to the honour you give today, what you acknowledge in us is our particular response to it. I appeal here today to his Excellency, the Ambassador of Russia and, through him to President Yeltsin, to stop the bombing of defenceless civilians in Chechnya. If conflicts and wars are an affair of the state, violations of humanitarian law, war crimes and crimes against humanity apply to all of us.

Let me say immediately that the extraordinary distinction that the Nobel Committee has given Médecins Sans Frontières is one that we accept with sincere gratitude.

But also a profound discomfort in knowing that the dignity of the excluded is assaulted daily. These are the forgotten populations in danger, like the street children who struggle each grinding hour to live off the waste of those who are 'included' in the social and economic order. These too

are the illegal refugees that we work with in Europe, who are denied political status and are afraid to seek health care, lest this contact leads to their expulsion.

Our action is to help people in situations of crisis. And ours is not a contented action. Bringing medical aid to people in distress is an attempt to defend them against what is aggressive to them as human beings. Humanitarian action is more than simple generosity, simple charity. It aims to build spaces of normalcy in the midst of what is abnormal. More than offering material assistance, we aim to enable individuals to regain their rights and dignity as human beings. As an independent volunteer association, we are committed to bringing direct medical aid to people in need. But we act not in a vacuum, and we speak not into the wind, but with a clear intent to assist, to provoke change, or to reveal injustice. Our action and our voice is an act of indignation, a refusal to accept an active or passive assault on the 'other'.

The honour you give us today could so easily go to so many organizations or worthy individuals who struggle in their own society. But clearly, you have made a choice to recognize MSF. We began formally in 1971 as a group of French doctors and journalists who decided to make themselves available, to assist. This meant sometimes a rejection of the practices of states that directly assault the dignity of people. Silence has long been confused with neutrality, and has

\* Acceptance speech by Dr James Orbinski of the Médecins Sans Frontières on the award of the Nobel Peace Prize for 1999, 10 December 1999. Reprinted with permission.

been presented as a necessary condition for humanitarian action.

From its beginning, MSF was created in opposition to this assumption. We are not sure that words can always save lives, but we know that silence can certainly kill. Over our 28 years we have been – and are today – firmly and irrevocably committed to this ethic of refusal. This is the proud genesis of our identity, and today we struggle as an imperfect movement, but strong in thousands of volunteers and national staff and with millions of donors who support, both financially and morally, the project that is MSF. This honour is shared with all who in one way or another have struggled and do struggle every day to make live the fragile reality that is MSF.

**H**umanitarianism occurs where the political has failed or is in crisis. We act not to assume political responsibility, but firstly to relieve the inhuman suffering of failure. The act must be free of political influence, and the political must recognize its responsibility to ensure that the humanitarian can exist. Humanitarian action requires a framework in which to act.

In conflict, this framework is international humanitarian law. It establishes rights for victims and humanitarian organisations and fixes the responsibility of states to ensure respect of these rights and to sanction their violation as war crimes. Today this framework is clearly dysfunctional. Access to victims of conflict is often refused. Humanitarian assistance is even used as a tool of war by belligerents. And more seriously, we are seeing the militarisation of humanitarian action by the international community.

In this dysfunction, we will speak out to push the political to assume its inescapable responsibility. Humanitarianism is not a tool to

end war or to create peace. It is a citizens' response to political failure. It is an immediate, short term act that cannot erase the long term necessity of political responsibility.

**A**nd ours is an ethic of refusal. It will not allow any moral, political failure or injustice to be sanitized or cleansed of its meaning. The 1992 crimes against humanity in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The 1994 genocide in Rwanda. The 1997 massacres in Zaire. The 1999 actual attacks on civilians in Chechnya. These cannot be masked by terms like 'complex humanitarian emergency', or 'internal security crisis'. Or by any other such euphemism – as though they are some random, politically undetermined event.

Language is determinant. It frames the problem and defines response, rights and therefore responsibilities. It defines whether a medical or humanitarian response is adequate. And it defines whether a political response is inadequate. No one calls a rape a complex gynecologic emergency. A rape is a rape, just as a genocide is a genocide. And both are a crime. For MSF, this is the humanitarian act: to seek to relieve suffering, to seek to restore autonomy, to witness to the truth of injustice, and to insist on political responsibility.

The work that MSF chooses does not occur in a vacuum, but in a social order that both includes and excludes, that both affirms and denies, and that both protects and attacks. Our daily work is a struggle, and it is intensely medical, and it is intensely personal. MSF is not a formal institution, and with any luck at all, it never will be. It is a civil society organization, and today civil society has a new global role, a new informal legitimacy that is rooted in its action and in its support from public opinion.

It is also rooted in the maturity of its intent, in for example the human rights, the environmental and the humanitarian movements, and of course, the movement for equitable trade. Conflict and violence are not the only subjects of concern. We, as members of civil society, will maintain our role and our power if we remain lucid in our intent and independence.

As civil society we exist relative to the state, to its institutions and its power. We also exist relative to other non-state actors such as the private sector. Ours is not to displace the responsibility of the state. Ours is not to allow a humanitarian alibi to mask the state responsibility to ensure justice and security. And ours is not to be co-managers of misery with the state. If civil society identifies a problem, it is not theirs to provide a solution, but it is theirs to expect that states will translate this into concrete and just solutions. Only the state has the legitimacy and power to do this.

**T**oday, a growing injustice confronts us. More than 90% of all death and suffering from infectious diseases occurs in the developing world. Some of the reasons that people die from – diseases like AIDS, TB, sleeping sickness and other tropical diseases – is that life-saving essential medicines are either too expensive, are not available because they are not seen as financially viable, or because there is virtually no new research and development for priority tropical diseases. This market failure is our next challenge. The challenge, however, is not ours alone. It is also for governments, international government institutions, the pharmaceutical industry and other NGOs to confront this injustice. What we as a civil society movement demand is change, not charity.

We affirm the independence of the humanitarian from the political,

but this is not to polarize the 'good' NGO against 'bad' governments, or the 'virtue' of civil society against the 'vice' of political power. Such a polemic is false and dangerous. As with slavery and welfare rights, history has shown that humanitarian preoccupations born in civil society have gained influence until they reach the political agenda. But these convergences should not mask the distinctions that exist between the political and the humanitarian.

**H**umanitarian action takes place in the short term, for limited groups and for limited objectives. This is at the same time both its strength and its limitation. The political can only be conceived in the long term, which itself is the movement of societies. Humanitarian action is by definition universal, or it is not. Humanitarian responsibility has no frontiers. Wherever in the world there is manifest distress, the humanitarian by vocation must respond. By contrast, the political knows borders, and where crisis occurs, political response will vary because historical relations, balance of power, and the interests of one or the other must be considered.

The time and space of the humanitarian are not those of the political. These vary in opposing ways, and this is another way to locate the founding principles of humanitarian action: the refusal of all forms of problem solving through sacrifice of the weak and vulnerable. No victim can be intentionally discriminated against or neglected to the advantage of another. One life today cannot be measured by its value tomorrow, and the relief of suffering 'here' cannot legitimize the abandoning of relief 'over there'. The limitation of means naturally must mean the making of choice, but the context and the constraints of action do not alter the fundamentals of this

humanitarian vision. It is a vision that by definition must ignore political choices.

Today there is a confusion and inherent ambiguity in the development of so-called 'military humanitarian operations'. We must reaffirm with vigour and clarity the principle of an independent civilian humanitarianism. And we must criticize those interventions called 'military humanitarian'. Humanitarian action exists only to preserve life, not to eliminate it. Our weapons are our transparency, the clarity of our intentions, as much as our medicines and our surgical instruments. Our weapons cannot be fighter jets and tanks, even if sometimes we think their use may respond to a necessity.

**W**e are not the same, we cannot be seen to be the same, and we cannot be made to be the same. Concretely, this is why we refused any funding from NATO member-states for our work in Kosovo. And this is why we were critical then and are critical now of the humanitarian discourse of NATO. It is also why on the ground we can work side by side with the presence of armed forces, but certainly not under their authority.

The debate on the *Droit d'Ingérence* – the right of state intervention for so-called humanitarian purposes – is further evidence of this ambiguity. It seeks to put at the level of the humanitarian, the political question of the abuse of power, and to seek a humanitarian legitimacy for a security action through military means. When one mixes the humanitarian with the need for public security, then one inevitably tars the humanitarian with the security brush.

It must be recalled that the UN Charter obliges states to intervene, sometimes by force, to stop threats to international peace and security.

There is no need, and indeed a danger, in using a humanitarian justification for this. In Helsinki this weekend governments will sit down to establish the makings of a European Army – but to be available for humanitarian purposes. We appeal to governments to go no further down this path of dangerous ambiguity. But we also encourage states to seek ways to enforce public security so that international humanitarian and human rights law can be respected.

**H**umanitarian action comes with limitations. It cannot be a substitute for political action. In Rwanda, early in the genocide, MSF spoke out to the world to demand that genocide be stopped by the use of force. And, so did the Red Cross. It was however, a cry that met with institutional paralysis; with acquiescence to self-interest, and with a denial of political responsibility to stop a crime that was 'never again' to go unchallenged. The genocide was over before the UN Operation Turquoise was launched.

I would like for a moment to acknowledge among our invited guests, Chantal Ndagijimana. She lost 40 members of her family in Rwanda's genocide in 1994. Today she is apart of our team in Brussels. She survived the genocide – but like a million others, her mother and father, brothers and sisters did not. And nor did many hundreds of our national staff. I was Head of Mission in Kigali during that time. No words can describe the sheer courage with which they worked. No words can describe the horror that they died in. And no words can describe the deepest sorrow that I and all in MSF will carry always.

I remember what one of my patients said to me in Kigali: 'Ummëra, Ummëra – sha'. It is a Rwandan saying that loosely translated, means 'courage, courage, my friend – find

and let live your courage'. It was said to me in Kigali at our hospital by a woman who was not just attacked with a machete, but her entire body, rationally and systematically, mutilated. Her ears had been cut off. And her face had been so carefully disfigured that a pattern was obvious in the slashes

**T**here were hundreds of women, children and men brought to the hospital that day, so many that we had to lay them out on the street. And in many cases, we operated on them then and there, as the gutters around the hospital literally ran red with blood. She was one among many – living an inhuman and simply indescribable suffering. We could do little more for her at that moment than stop the bleeding with a few necessary sutures. We were completely overwhelmed, and she knew that there were so many others. She knew and I knew. She released me from my own inescapable hell. She said to me in the clearest voice I have ever heard, 'allez, allez ... ummera, ummera-sha' – 'go, go ... my friend; find and let live your courage'.

There are limits to humanitarianism. No doctor can stop a genocide. No humanitarian can stop ethnic cleansing, just as no humanitarian can make war. And no humanitarian can make peace. These are political responsibilities, not humanitarian imperatives. Let me say this very clearly: the humanitarian act is the most apolitical of all acts, but if its actions and its morality are taken seriously, it has the most profound of political implications. And the fight against impunity is one of these implications.

This is exactly what has been affirmed with the creation of the international criminal courts for both the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. It is also what has been affirmed with the adoption of statutes for an International Criminal Court. These are sig-

nificant steps. But today on the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the court does not yet exist, and the principles have only been ratified by three states in the last year. At this rate it will take 20 years before the court comes into being. Must we wait this long? Whatever the political costs of creating justice for states, MSF can and will testify that the human costs of impunity is impossible to bare.

Only states can impose respect for humanitarian law and that effort cannot be purely symbolic. Srebrenica was apparently a safe haven in which we were present. The UN was also present. It said it would protect. It had 'blue helmets' on the ground. And the UN stood silent and present – as the people of Srebrenica were massacred.

**A**fter the deadly attempts of UN intervention in former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, which led to the death of thousands, MSF objects to the principle of military intervention which do not stipulate clear frameworks of responsibility and transparency. MSF does not want military forces to show that they can put up refugee tents faster than NGOs. Armies should be at the service of governments and policies which seek to protect the rights of victims.

If UN military operations are to protect civilian populations in the future, going beyond the *mea culpa* excuses of the Secretary General over Srebrenica and Rwanda, there must be a reform of peacekeeping operations in the UN. Member states of the Security Council must/should be held publicly accountable for the decisions that they do or do not vote for. Their right to veto should be regulated. Member states should be bound to ensure that adequate means are made available to implement the decisions they take.

Yes, humanitarian action has limits. It too also has responsibility. It is not only about rules of right conduct and technical performance. It is at first an ethic framed in a morality. The moral intention of the humanitarian act must be confronted with its actual result. And it is here where any form of moral neutrality about what is good must be rejected. The result can be the use of the humanitarian in 1985 to support forced migration in Ethiopia, or the use in 1996 of the humanitarian to support a genocidal regime in the refugee camps of Goma.

**A**bstention is sometimes necessary so that the humanitarian is not used against a population in crisis. More recently, in North Korea, we were the first independent humanitarian organization to gain access in 1995. However, we chose to leave in the fall of 1998. Why? Because we came to the conclusion that our assistance could not be given freely and independent of political influence from the state authorities. We found that the most vulnerable were likely to remain so, as food aid is used to support a system that in the first instance creates vulnerability and starvation among millions.

Our humanitarian action must be given independently, with a freedom to assess, to deliver and to monitor assistance so that the most vulnerable are assisted first. Aid must not mask the causes of suffering, and it cannot be simply an internal or foreign policy tool that creates rather than counters human suffering. If this is the case, we must confront the dilemma and consider abstention as the least of bad options. As MSF, we constantly call into question the limits and ambiguities of humanitarian action – particularly when it submits in silence to the interests of states and armed forces.



Last week, the United States Congress passed a bill authorizing direct food transfers to the rebels in South Sudan. This is a misappropriation of the meaning and intent of humanitarian assistance. It makes food a fuel of war. And it is a dereliction of a states' duty to use any and all political means to address a 17 year-long civil war that has left millions dead.

Sudan's civil war today is a human misery where millions are displaced and at risk of starvation and disease, where people are bombed, robbed, looted constantly, and even enslaved, while corporate oil interests are protected; where humanitarian space is so severely restricted that it exists only in pockets, and where we and other NGOs and UN agencies struggle to bring humanitarian assistance and protection.

**I**s food the only political option to curb war? Food aid or humanitarian assistance, if it is to be 'humanitarian assistance' cannot be a tool in statecraft. In this case we must denounce the perfidious use of food that confuses the meaning of humanitarian assistance. If the political masks itself in an ambulance, then it is certain that the ambulance will be fired on. As well, if food is allowed to be used as a weapon of war then it also legitimates that populations can be starved as a weapon of war.

Independent humanitarianism is a daily struggle to assist and protect. In the vast majority of our projects it is played out away from the media spotlight, and away from the attention of the politically powerful. It is lived most deeply, most intimately, in the daily grind of forgotten wars and forgotten crises. Numerous peoples of Africa literally agonise in a continent rich in natural resources and culture. Hundreds of thousands of our contem-

poraries are forced to leave their lands and their family to search for work, food, to educate their children and to stay alive. Men and women risk their lives to embark on clandestine journeys only to end up in a hellish immigration detention centre, or barely surviving on the periphery of our so-called civilised world.

**O**ur volunteers and staff live and work among people whose dignity is violated every day. These volunteers choose freely to use their liberty to make the world a more bearable place. Despite grand debates on world order, the act of humanitarianism comes down to one thing: individual human beings reaching out to their counterparts who find themselves in the most difficult circumstances. One bandage at a time, one suture at a time, one vaccination at a time. And, uniquely for Médecins Sans Frontières, working in around 80 countries, over 20 of which are in conflict, telling the world what they have seen. All this in the hope that the cycles of violence and destruction will not continue endlessly.

As we accept this extraordinary honour, we want again to thank the Nobel Committee for its affirmation of the right to humanitarian assistance around the globe. For its affirmation of the road MSF has chosen to take: to remain outspoken, passionate and deeply committed to its core principles of volunteerism, impartiality, and its belief that every person deserves both medical assistance and the recognition of his or her humanity.

We would like to take this opportunity to state our deepest appreciation to the volunteers and national staff who have made these ambitious ideals a concrete reality, and who have, we believe, brought some peace to the world that has experienced such immense suffering and who are the living reality of MSF.

# Backpage

THE ongoing spat between the UGC and Delhi University over support to higher education cannot but create dismay. Both the university authorities and the teachers' associations are alleging a severe resource crunch, even raising the spectre of non-payment of salaries in the new year. The Commission expectedly demurs. It, in turn, has foregrounded the mismanagement and bungling by the university as also the constituent colleges as most responsible for the current mess. Clouding the situation further is the reported comment by Amartya Sen that the real problem of the university is not a paucity of resources but a lack of concern with quality.

There is little doubt that we probably have too many universities and post-graduate colleges – most under-equipped and peopled by indifferent quality teachers and researchers. Even the best are bedevilled with structural problems from student indiscipline to teacher absenteeism. The tensions generated by inadequate and decaying infrastructure are exacerbated by an outmoded structure of rules and unhealthy interference by both the political and bureaucratic class. Little wonder that the 'products' are often ill-trained and unemployable.

For a country which, at least among Third World nations, prides itself on the quality of its manpower, the lack of engagement with the higher education sector can only be described as tragic. Not that there is any dearth of analysis – from the Radhakrishnan and Kothari Commission reports in the '50s and '60s to the Pannaya and Swaminathan committees more recently – with their plethora of suggestions.

What is more troubling is a widely held belief that Indian higher education is over-pampered and subsidised, and that this has contributed to the starvation of the elementary education sector. Witness the recurrent demands for privatization and fee enhancement – in short reducing the burden the sector places on the public exchequer. The truth, as always, is a little more complex.

A recent study by N.V. Varghese of the National Institute for Educational Planning and Administration points out that at no time have we approached the recommended target of 6% of GNP to be spent on education. While the overall expenditure on education did rise from 1.2% of GNP in 1951 to 3.7% in 1991, the share of higher education actually fell from 0.9% to 0.56%. Similarly, while the proportion of recurring expenditure on higher education rose from 20% (1951) to 29%

(1979-80), it today stands at 18%, lower than the 1951 figure. The situation in terms of plan expenditure is even more stark, the proportions changing from 9% in the first plan to 25% in the fourth plan to a low of 7% in the eight plan.

Equally instructive is the analysis of the sources of support. The share of the government in higher education increased from 49.7% in 1950-51 to 79.7% in 1985-86. Fees which contributed as much as 36.8% in 1950-51 has, however, declined to 14.4%, as has the share of endowments and other earnings (from 13.8% to 4.5%). Overall, the picture is that government expenditure, while up in absolute terms has declined as a proportion of overall public expenditure, and that sources of non-official support have drastically declined.

Within the university system, the situation of state universities is far worse. And loading them with the recommendations of the 5th Pay Commission ensures that these institutions can only shut down. Obviously, therefore, while public pressure to enhance funding for education, including higher education, must be maintained, there is no getting away from exploring and cultivating alternative, additional avenues of support. Just insisting, as so many of our teacher bodies are prone to, that the university is a charge on the state is an exercise foredoomed to failure.

If our institutions of higher learning, more so those providing general education in the humanities and social sciences, are to attract greater financial support, both governmental and private, they will need to re-invent themselves as more useful and relevant. Enhancing fees or arranging loans for students, though essential, is a part answer, for increasing the cost of education is liable to be socially iniquitous and loaded against courses which are not seen as instrumentally useful. Raising endowments is one way; exploring the possibility of instituting a graduate tax is another.

Whatever be the mix of strategies, the university community, more the teachers than the administration, needs to debate ways of increasing efficiency of resource use while improving quality, if it has to garner public support. Academic autonomy, creatively used, can at least help institute greater meaning to the enterprise. Opposing the UGC moves in this direction, as Delhi University seems prone to, is no answer to Amartya Sen's plea. No way to prepare for the coming millennium.

**Harsh Sethi**

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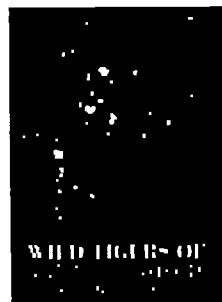


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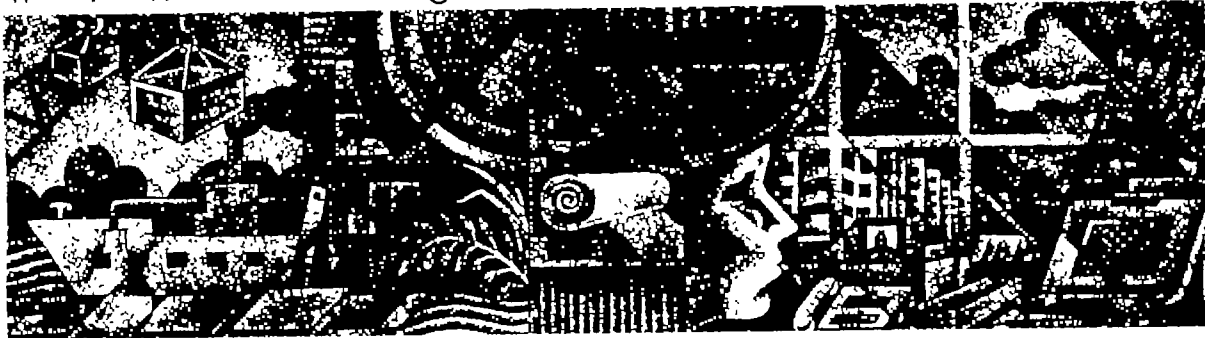
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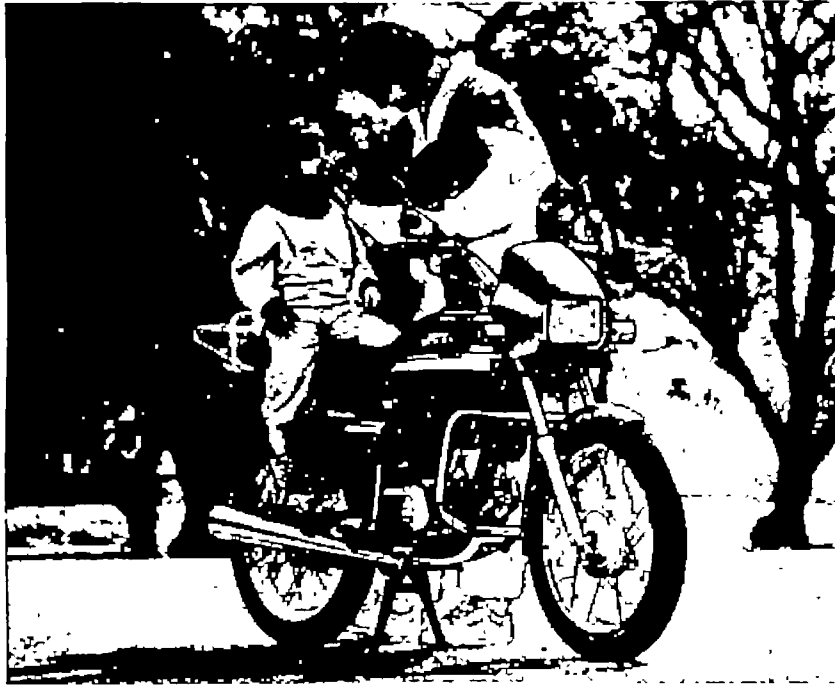
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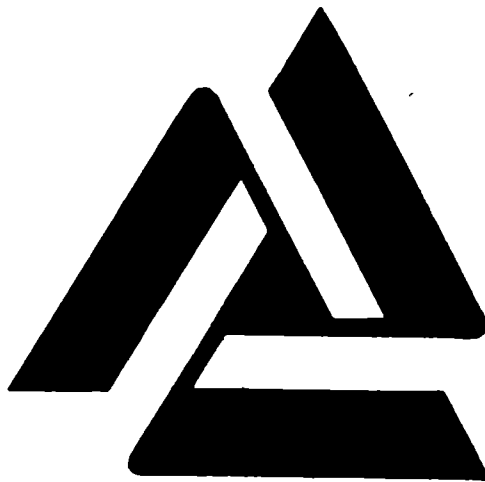
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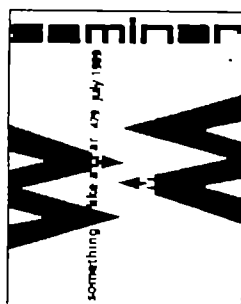
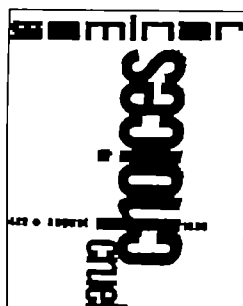
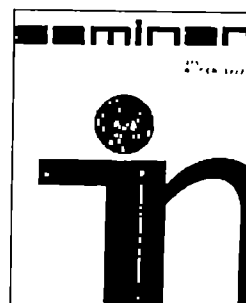
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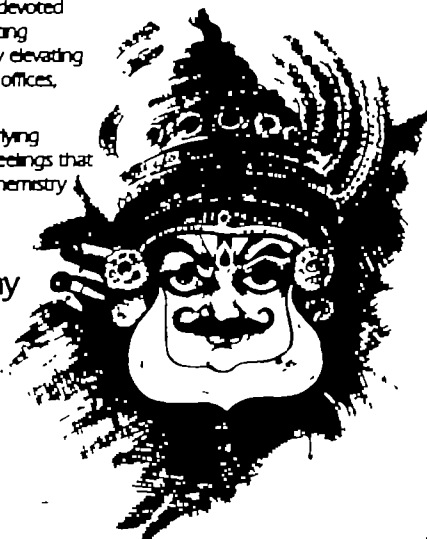
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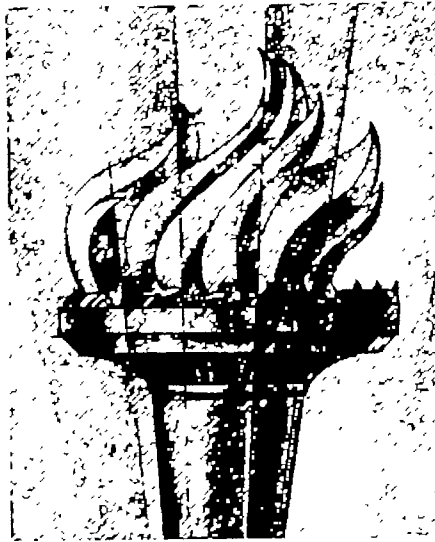


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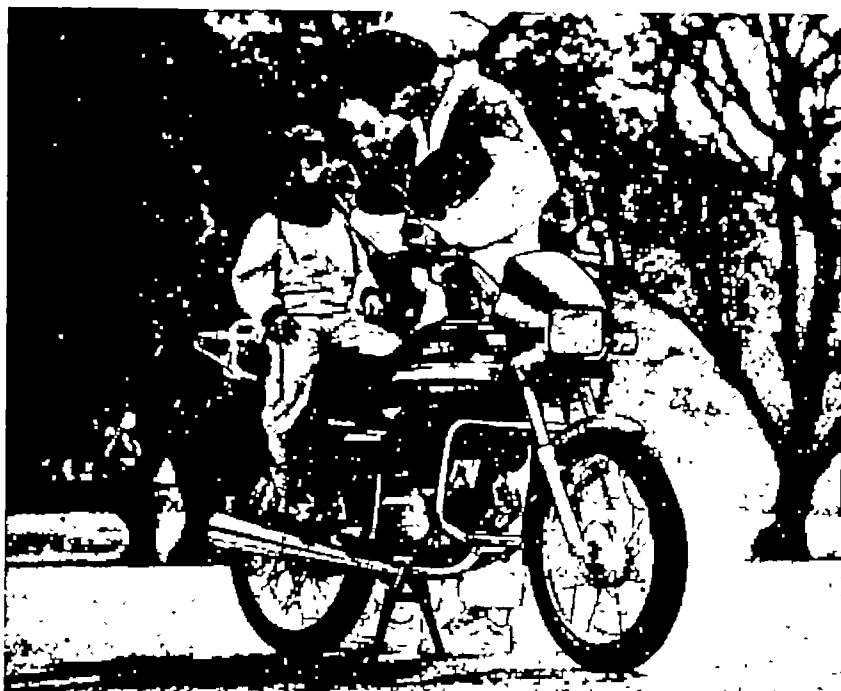
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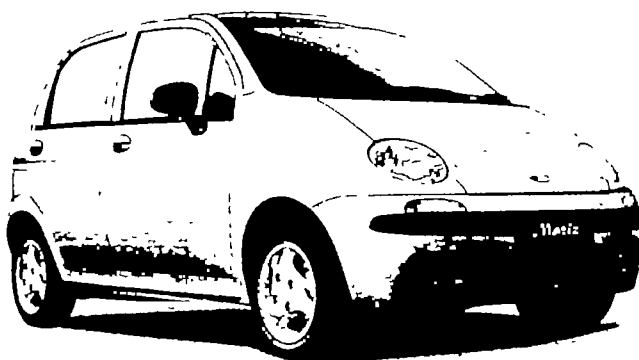


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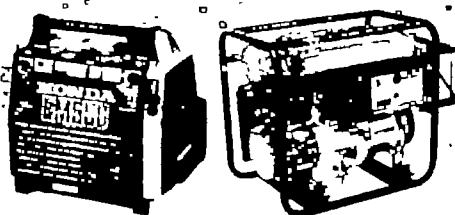
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# The problem

IN a world where most of us are busy earning and spending, where the dominant ideology is one of 'consume now, worry later', and where the wizardry of information technology has given society a strong sense of techno-optimism and freedom from material constraints, it is a minor miracle that environmental issues are still on the table.

The sustained efforts of environmental activists, scientists, and the media have not only made issues like deforestation, air pollution, water pollution, climate change, ozone hole, and tiger extinction an integral part of the coffee-table but also penetrated political and bureaucratic spheres. From 'poverty being the biggest polluter' at Stockholm 1972, the rhetoric has moved to 'sustainable development', and conventions on climate change, biodiversity and forestry are being actively pursued at the international level. With the World Bank undertaking a major 'greening' exercise for itself, it would seem that environmentalism has finally arrived.

But in fact, environmentalism is also under severe attack. The attacks come from different ends of the political spectrum and adopt different strategies. In the North, conservative groups are questioning the very existence or seriousness of many environmental problems, and attacking the underlying belief that there are biophysical limits to human activities that should not be transgressed. In the South, in addition to this angle, the more powerful and demoralising attack comes in the casting of environmentalists as 'anti-developmentalists', 'anti-poor' and 'elitist'. Deforestation should not be contained at the cost of the lives and livelihoods of those who have encroached the forest to make a living. The tiger should not be protected at the cost of those living in and around the tiger habitat. The Narmada valley should not be saved because the millions living in north Gujarat have a 'basic human right' to water

Admittedly, much of this pooh-pohing of environmental decline flies in the face of serious analysis or even just a walk through our fast polluting cities. Similarly, much of the criticism of environmentalist opposition to development projects as elitist is simply a distortion. Over the past two decades, many environmentalists have consciously reached out to grassroots development activists, have (as in the case of the Narmada) argued convincingly that it is not a case of environment versus people, but a conflict between a monument-oriented pursuit of unjust and illusory development schemes and a vision of an environmentally sound and socially fair development process. This pooh-poohing, this illusory monumentalism, this running down of environmentalism is largely driven by powerful interest groups and facilitated by deeply embedded power structures.

And yet, one wonders if some blame also attaches to the environmental movement. Have they cried wolf too often? Oversold the problem? Hyped up their particular solutions? Is the lack of public acceptance of environmentalist positions at least partly related to socially insensitive, alienating or biased analyses about the existence, nature and causal agents of environmental decline?

The mainstreaming of environmental issues critically hinges on a public dissemination and acceptance of the *real and pressing* nature of environmental problems. Thus, we are told and have come to believe that flooding in the Gangetic plains is on the increase, that the Saharan desert is moving southward at so many kilometres per year, and that tropical deforestation is occurring at some many million square kilometres everywhere. The global climate is warming up and the size of the seasonal ozone hole is increasing

Furthermore, solving or ameliorating these problems requires changes in state policies and individual



lifestyles. Identifying the necessary changes in turn requires that these cases of environmental degradation be linked up causally with specific human actions. Scientists, activists and the media are engaged in the construction and dissemination of this causal link, this 'story behind' environmental degradation. Starting from the link that Rachel Carson drew between the decline of birds of prey and the use of DDT, many of the causes of environmental degradation are also now part of the popular lexicon. Thus, flooding in the Gangetic plain is due to deforestation in the Himalaya, desertification in the Sahel is due to uncontrolled grazing of booming livestock populations, deforestation is due to shifting cultivation in Indonesia and immigrant settlers and cattle ranching in the Amazon. And, in popular discourse, most of these proximate causes are ultimately related to an expanding human population.

The tail-end of these stories, viz., the causal analysis, is obviously a rather debatable matter. The debate over the role of 'overpopulation' in the South versus 'overconsumption' in the North surfaces persistently at every international meeting on the environment. But within India, population growth continues to be the most widely accepted cause for a whole range of environmental phenomena by natural scientists, journalists, politicians and laypersons alike. The next favourite is 'poverty' (in the abstract), which is said to lead to force people to act in a short-sighted manner, or to 'discount' their own future heavily. It is also both cause and effect of population growth and thus part of a 'vicious cycle of poverty-population growth-environmental degradation-poverty.' Indeed, this vicious cycle theory is at the core of the broad international consensus that has evolved around the concept 'sustainable development' as the new paradigm.<sup>1</sup> Other

1 Sharachchandra Lélé, 'Sustainable Development: A Critical Review', *World Development* 19(6), 1991, pp. 607-621

factors such as 'colonialism', the 'iron triangle' of bureaucrats-industrialists-politicians, ignorance, disempowerment of women, and the loss of traditional knowledge also find favour in more academic discussions. But there is no doubt in anybody's mind about what constitutes environmental degradation, about the fact that it is occurring, and that it is somehow linked to one or two of these factors

There are, however, serious problems even with the earlier part of the story. In some cases, the physical process linking cause and effect may simply not exist. For instance, it now appears that deforestation in the Himalaya, even if it is happening, has little to do with floods in the Gangetic plain.<sup>2</sup> Declining productivity of the Sahelian rangelands has little to do with overgrazing.<sup>3</sup>

But surely, one would say, whatever the cause, floods themselves are increasing, soil itself is eroding, rangelands are declining? Unfortunately, apparently 'clear' trends in an environmental variable often disappear when examined on a longer time frame or with better data. Recent research on the Saharan desert shows that the movement of the desert boundary is not unidirectional but rather fluctuates in response to cyclical patterns of rainfall in the region, exploding the 'Myth of the Marching Desert'.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, in a

2 L. Hamilton, 'What are the Impacts of Himalayan Deforestation on the Ganges-Brahmaputra Lowlands and Delta? Assumptions and Facts', *Mountain Research and Development* 7, 1987, pp. 256-263. J. Ives and B. Messerli, *The Himalayan Dilemma: Reconciling Development and Conservation*, Routledge, New York, 1989

3 R. Mace, 'Overgrazing Overstated', *Nature* 349(6307), 1991, 280-281

4. B. Forss, 'The Myth of the Marching Desert', *New Scientist* 4, 1989, p. 3132. C. J. Tucker, H. Dregne and W. Newcomb, 'Expansion and Contraction of the Sahara Desert from 1980 to 1990', *Science* 253, 1991, 299-301

rather delicious irony, the very Centre for Science and Environment which highlighted environmental degradation across the country in so comprehensive a manner in its first two Citizen's Reports<sup>5</sup> has argued in its third report<sup>6</sup> that increasing damage to property and life in the Gangetic plains is not due to increase in flooding intensity or frequency but rather due to growing density of human settlements in flood-prone areas.

To further complicate matters, even where good science demonstrates incontrovertibly the existence of a trend, it is not clear that this trend is necessarily socially 'bad'. Conversion of forests to agriculture is an age-old phenomenon occurring across the South Asian landscape, and surely agriculture is also a social 'good'? Thus, in many cases, the very definition of degradation comes under challenge. Ultimately, 'degradation is a social construct'.<sup>7</sup> What looks degraded to one person may seem very productive to another. Foresters look for straight, tall timber stands, whereas ecologists look for diverse ecological communities, while the local person may simply want to use the landscape for meeting his/her subsistence goals. As with all social constructs, one's socialization and social (or socio-ecological) position directly influence one's definition of 'good forest'. Coming up with an overarching, consensual definition of degradation is a highly challenging, if not impossible, task at the best of times.

Unfortunately, rather than confront this socially relative nature of degradation openly, most of us fall prey to the pressures of our institutional situations, gloss over differences in definition, discrepancies in data, and doubts about causal links to come up with 'convincing' stories about impending or ongoing environmental 'disasters'. Scientists might pay lip-service to the equal importance of 'negative' results, but in practice, statements like 'we could detect any convincing and statistically significant signs of deg-

radation' are rarely seen as publication-worthy. For activists, the alarmist rhetoric is a directly driven by one's own interventionist agendas; the greater the alarm the greater the justification for intervention.

Admittedly, to be heard at all above the ambient cacophony of glorious consumerism, one has to raise one's voice very high. If, in the process, it sounds a little shrill, well, surely it is a small price to pay? For the mainstream to pay any attention, issues need to be summarized in two-minute sound bytes. If this leads one into simplifying complex issues, surely again it is better to do so rather than not raise the issue at all? We would argue, however, that in the long run such insensitivity to questions of social definition of degradation, scientific complexities in determining its ecological presence and processes, and the concomitant oversimplification in the analysis of its social causes is bound to be disastrous for the environmental movement itself.

On the one hand, it will raise doubts about the legitimacy of other environmental problems such as climate change or pollution where scientific opinion is in fact converging. On the other hand, we would do well to keep in mind that historically environmental degradation has been routinely used to deny marginalized communities access to resources that are then made available to (or have already been destroyed by) the elites. In many parts of colonial Africa, local hunting was banned on the grounds that it posed a threat to animal populations, while hunting speers by white colonists were permitted and even extolled.<sup>8</sup> Banning shifting cultivation in Indonesia or cattle herding in India ostensibly to save a climate of which the buffering capacity has been destroyed largely by unbridled fossil fuel consumption in the West is but a repetition of this age-old saga.

It is not that degradation is not taking place; by all means let us be concerned about it. But let us recognize that our social position and cultural bias, our training as scientists or agendas as activists, influence our perceptions of the situation as much as the evidence we bring to bear on our story. Too often, there is no evidence, only a story. There is a critical need for greater nuances in talking about degradation, particularly where there is a call for intervention in the lives of communities with few options for and little voice in the use and management of their natural environment.

SHARACHCHANDRA LÉLÉ  
and VASANT K. SABERWAL

5. Anil Agarwal, R. Chopra and K. Sharma (eds.), *The State of India's Environment: The First Citizen's Report*, Centre for Science and Environment, Delhi, 1982; Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain (eds.), *The State of India's Environment 1984-85. The Second Citizen's Report*, Centre for Science and Environment, Delhi, 1985.

6. Centre for Science and Environment, *Floods, Flood Plains and Environmental Myths: State of India's Environment Third Citizen's Report*, Centre for Science and Environment, Delhi, 1992.

7. P. Blaikie and H. Brookfield (eds.), *Land Degradation and Society*, Methuen, New York, 1987.

8. J.M. MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation and British Imperialism*, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, 1988.

# Jhum: shifting opinions

T R SHANKAR RAMAN

OVER three decades ago, P.D. Stracey listed a number of problems caused by slash-and-burn shifting cultivation or *jhum* as commonly practised by indigenous tribes in North East India. This 'primitive' form of agriculture, according to him, resulted in serious environmental problems: loss of forest cover, erosion of topsoil, desertification, and declines in forest productivity.<sup>1</sup> Others have also decried *jhum* as an inefficient form of agriculture, an impediment to progress of forestry, and an agent of destruction of biodiversity.<sup>2</sup> Such beliefs have been widespread since British times, and have even resulted in forcible suppression of the practice, oppression and relocation of tribals in Central India and other hill regions.<sup>3</sup>

1 P.D. Stracey, 1967, 'A note on Nagaland', *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 64: 440-446.

2 D. Borah and N.R. Goswami, 1973, A comparative study of crop production under shifting and terrace cultivation (a case study in the Garo hills, Meghalaya). Ad hoc Study 35. Agro-economic Research Centre for North East India, Jorhat, A.P. Dwivedi, 1993, *Forests: the ecological ramifications*. Natraj Publishers, Dehradun, R.R. Rao and P.K. Hajra, 1986, 'Floristic diversity of the eastern Himalaya in a conservation perspective', *Proceedings of the Indian Academy of Sciences (Animal Sciences/Plant Science Supplement)* November: 103-125.

In contrast, studies by ethnologists have tended to view shifting cultivation favourably. It is considered a diversified system, well adapted to local conditions in moist forest and hilly tracts.<sup>4</sup> Others have argued that traditional shifting cultivation may not be as destructive as modern forest exploitation for timber. Clearance of small patches of forest with long fallow periods may even enhance biodiversity in the landscape due to the creation of a variety of habitats.<sup>5</sup> Amidst such contrasting views, there is a clear need for reliable empirical and scientific data on the nature and

3 C. von Furer-Haimendorf, 1982, *Tribes of India, the struggle for survival*. Oxford University Press, Delhi. M. Gadgil and R. Guha, 1992, *This Fissured Land: an ecological history of India*. Oxford University Press, Delhi.

4 H. Conklin, 1969, An ethnoecological approach to shifting agriculture, pp. 221-233, in A.P. Vayda (ed), *Environment and Cultural Behaviour*. Academic Press, New York; O. Horst, 1989, 'The persistence of milpa agriculture in highland Guatemala', *Journal of Cultural Geography* 9: 13-29; M.J. Eden, 1987, 'Traditional shifting cultivation and the tropical forest system', *Trends in Ecology and Evolution* 2: 340-343, R. Guha, 1994, Fighting for the Forest: state forestry and social change in tribal India, pp. 20-37, in O. Mendelsohn and U. Baxi (eds), *The Rights of Subordinated Peoples*. Oxford University Press, Delhi.

5 M. Gadgil and R. Guha, 1992, op cit.

ecological impact of jhum.

Shifting cultivation, variously known as rotational bush-fallow agriculture, swidden cultivation, or slash-and-burn cultivation, is an ancient form of agriculture still commonly practised in many parts of the humid tropics. Within India, shifting agriculture or jhum is practised predominantly in the hill tracts of eastern and North Eastern India. At least 100 different indigenous tribes and over 620,000 families in the seven states of North East India depend on jhum for their subsistence.<sup>6</sup> This article makes a reappraisal of some of the widespread beliefs, myths and opinions regarding jhum as practised in North East India.

Although the pattern and details of shifting cultivation differ in different places and tribes, there are broad similarities. Jhum cultivation usually involves cutting of second-growth bamboo forests. Since old growth or primary forest is less extensively available and is more difficult to clear, they are cultivated infrequently. The clearing work usually begins in January-February. The slashed vegetation is allowed to dry on the hill slopes for 1-2 months prior to burning in March-April. Crops are sown with the first rains in April in plots that are 1-4 ha in area. Usually, inter-cropping of one or more paddy varieties with 15-20 other crops (vegetables, maize, chillies, gourds, cotton, arum, and mustard) is carried out.

**T**he economics and efficiency of shifting agriculture has been studied in Meghalaya and other states of North East India by a team of scientists led by P.S. Ramakrishnan.<sup>7</sup> These studies

showed that, far from being primitive and inefficient, jhum is an ingenious system of organic multiple cropping well suited to the heavy rainfall areas of the hill tracts. The economic and energetic efficiency of jhum is higher than alternative forms of agriculture such as terrace and valley cultivation. This is mainly because terrace and valley cultivation needs expensive external input such as fertilisers (which often get leached or lost in the heavy rainfall hill slopes) and pesticides, besides labour for terracing. Monetary output-input ratios (rupees/ha/year) range from about 1.8 for jhum cycles of 5-10 years to 2.1 for a 20-year jhum cycle. This is higher than the values for settled terrace cultivation (1.43) and valley cultivation (<1.3). Energetic output-input ratio (MJ/ha/year) in jhum is twice that of valley cultivation and over five times that of terrace cultivation.<sup>8</sup> Even gross returns (rupees/ha) from jhum are about 1.9 times higher than for terrace cultivation.<sup>9</sup>

**I**t is commonly believed that jhum was a sustainable system in the past when fallow periods were long, but with increasing population pressure jhum cycles have declined and become unsustainable. The evidence for this is weak. In a review, Singh<sup>10</sup> has pointed out that: (i) there is often no strong relationship between population pressure and jhum cycles, (ii) villagers choose to cultivate at cycles of 5-10 years even when longer fallow periods are possible, and (iii) that population density would impinge on jhum cycle only after some critical threshold of high population pressure

is crossed. The duration of the fallow period is influenced by the ease of clearing the vegetation and soil fertility levels following the slash-and-burn operations. The burning of slash returns nutrients to the soil through ash and kills microbes allowing relatively high yields. Yields decline as the soil is depleted through one year of cropping and cultivation is rarely carried out for more than a year. When fields are abandoned, there is rapid regeneration of bamboo and other plants. After ten years, the vegetation and soil properties recover to levels that can support another round of jhum cultivation.<sup>11</sup> In some areas with better regrowth of bamboo, even shorter fallow cycles may be feasible and sustainable.<sup>12</sup> Where fallow cycles are less than five years, jhum cultivation may be stabilised using modern technical inputs,<sup>13</sup> while concurrently developing alternative village-based occupations.<sup>14</sup>

**T**he superiority of jhum cultivation over some forms of sedentary cultivation partly explains the persistence of this form of agriculture in North East India. Other reasons include the economic security provided by jhum and its cultural importance to indigenous tribes. Poor access to markets, capital, and technical knowhow of more commercially rewarding alternatives such as horticulture and cash crop cultivation also hinders the transition to other occupations. Clearly, one cannot do away with jhum assuming it to be a primitive and inefficient system, as attempted in governmental jhum

6. P.S. Ramakrishnan, 1992, *Shifting Agriculture and Sustainable Development: an interdisciplinary study from north-eastern India* MAB Series, Volume 10, UNESCO, Paris.

7. Ibid

8. Ibid

9. K.N. Ninan, 1992, 'Economics of shifting cultivation in India', *Economic and Political Weekly* March 28A: 2-6.

10. D. Singh, 1996, *The Last Frontier: people and forests in Mizoram* Tata Energy Research Institute, New Delhi.

11. P.S. Ramakrishnan, 1992, op. cit.

12. D. Singh, 1996, op. cit.

13. P.S. Ramakrishnan, 1992, op. cit.; U. Shankar, Tawnenga and R.S. Tripathi, 1996, 'Evaluating second year cropping on jhum fallows in Mizoram, North-eastern India - phytomass dynamics and primary productivity', *Journal of Biosciences* 21: 563-575.

14. K.N. Ninan, 1992, op. cit.

control programmes and new land use policies.<sup>15</sup> Instead, an unbiased understanding of the advantages of jhum is required for proper design and implementation of developmental programmes.

Erosion of valuable topsoil in the hills due to jhum has been alleged to cause siltation and floods in the plains. Singh<sup>16</sup> has reviewed studies carried out by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research that compared soil erosion from jhum fields with other forms of cultivation on terraces and contour bunds. These studies show that jhum fields cultivated for a single year and abandoned (the most common practice) have less erosive losses of soil than the other forms of settled cultivation.

Some erosion of topsoil is inevitable in any form of cultivation in the high rainfall hill tracts. Soil erosion is minimised in jhum due to the retaining of rootstocks of bamboo and trees in burned plots, the rapid recovery of weeds and bamboo following abandonment, and the interspersing of forests and fields on hill slopes.<sup>17</sup> The evidence for siltation of rivers and floods because of soil erosion due to jhum is weak and possibly untenable. Other factors, such as large scale logging for timber extraction, may be responsible to a greater extent for the deforestation and environmental problems in North East India.

**W**hat is the extent of deforestation and loss of forest cover that can be attributed to jhum? This question has no simple answer. Forest cover estimates from different sources vary and, at best, report only amount of dense (>40% canopy cover) and open (<40% canopy cover) forest. The dense for-

est category could include plantations and dense secondary forest with bamboo. The estimates of changes in forest cover, therefore, do not give a clear picture of the changes in the nature of forest types. Estimates produced between 1975 and 1983 of the area affected annually by shifting cultivation in India varied enormously from 9,956 to 90,000 square kilometres.<sup>18</sup> Between 1989 and 1991, a net decrease of forest cover of 387 km<sup>2</sup> due to jhum was estimated for the seven states of North East India.<sup>19</sup> The forest loss due to jhum increased to 448 km<sup>2</sup> between 1991 and 1993<sup>20</sup> and then decreased to 175 km<sup>2</sup> lost between 1993 and 1995.<sup>21</sup>

**T**he extent of forest loss due to jhum varies from state to state. Over the same period, the amount of forest cover lost appears to be declining in Arunachal Pradesh, increasing in Nagaland and Manipur, and fluctuating in Mizoram between a loss of 156 km<sup>2</sup> in 1989-91 to a gain of 199 km<sup>2</sup> in 1993-95.<sup>22</sup> Clearly, there is no simple relationship between jhum and forest loss, implying dynamic changes in forest cover due to the interacting effects of various factors.

Monitoring forest loss due to jhum from satellite requires more

accurate ground-truthing. The shifting cultivation landscape is a mosaic of forests, fields and fallows. Every year the complexion of the landscape changes because of varying juxtaposition and interspersing of these elements. It is important to distinguish different successional stages of vegetation regrowth, especially dense forest cover that represents bamboo regrowth habitats or plantations rather than mature tropical wet forest. External influences that reduce available area for shifting cultivation, such as the loss of traditional jhum land to commercial tree plantations or development, will also have to be considered. Only a more detailed and dynamic analysis of such changes will give a clear picture of trends of change in forest cover due to jhum.

**T**he belief that jhum has a detrimental impact on wildlife finds support in recent studies. Studies in Mizoram on rainforest birds, arboreal mammals, and plants have shown that second-growth habitats created by jhum, especially young fallows and dense, monotypic bamboo forests, support only a fraction of the species found in undisturbed primary tropical rainforest.<sup>23</sup> Species that thrive in open fallows and young bamboo forests are mainly common, widespread ones, such as bulbuls, tailorbirds, and hoarybellied squirrels, which are of little conservation importance. A large number of specialised and endangered

23. Ministry of Environment and Forests, 1997, The State of the Forest Report - 1997 Forest Survey of India. Government of India, Dehradun. T.R.S. Raman, 1996, 'Impact of shifting cultivation on diurnal squirrels and primates in Mizoram, North East India - a preliminary study', *Current Science* 70: 747-750. T.R.S. Raman, G.S. Rawat and A.J.T. Johnsingh, 1998, 'Recovery of tropical rainforest avifauna in relation to vegetation succession following shifting cultivation in Mizoram, North East India', *Journal of Applied Ecology* 35: 214-231.

15 D Singh, 1996, op cit

16 Ibid

17 P.S. Ramakrishnan, 1992, op cit

18 Ministry of Environment and Forests, 1987, The State of the Forest Report - 1987. Forest Survey of India. Government of India, Dehradun

19. Ministry of Environment and Forests, 1993, The State of the Forest Report - 1993 Forest Survey of India. Government of India, Dehradun

20 Ministry of Environment and Forests, 1995, The State of the Forest Report - 1995 Forest Survey of India. Government of India, Dehradun

21 Ministry of Environment and Forests, 1997, The State of the Forest Report - 1997 Forest Survey of India. Government of India, Dehradun

22. Ministry of Environment and Forests, Reports of 1993, 1995, 1997, op cit

rainforest plants and animals such as hoolock gibbons, capped langurs, Pallas's and Malayan giant squirrels, hornbills, peacock-pheasants, wren-babblers, and woodpeckers occur only in undisturbed primary forest.<sup>24</sup>

As fallow regrowth is rapid, many species may survive if jhum cycles are long enough to allow substantial forest regeneration. It has been estimated that regrowth habitats begin attaining biodiversity values close to those in primary forest only after at least 25 years (for birds) and 50-75 years (for woody plants).<sup>25</sup> In most areas, jhum cycles are far below this – usually less than 10 years. Clearly then, there is a need to protect mature tropical forest for the conservation of biodiversity. In the past, this has been achieved mainly through central and state laws that created 'safety' and 'supply' village forest reserves, wildlife sanctuaries and national parks. In some areas, such as Meghalaya, sacred groves set aside and protected by village communities also conserve a significant portion of local biodiversity.<sup>26</sup> The erosion of traditional values and deterioration of sacred groves in recent times is, however, a matter for concern.<sup>27</sup> Although jhum is most commonly blamed, other factors such as conversion to monoculture commercial tree plantations, and logging for timber extraction can also have negative impacts on biodiversity.

**R**apid demographic and social changes have occurred in many tribal

24. T.R.S. Raman, 1996, op cit, T.R.S. Raman, G.S. Rawat, G.S. and A.J.T. Johnsingh, 1998, op cit

25. P.S. Ramakrishnan, 1992, op cit T.R.S. Raman, G.S. Rawat, and A.J.T. Johnsingh, 1998, op cit

26. B.K. Tiwari, S.K. Bork and R.S. Tipathi, 1998, 'Biodiversity value, status, and strategies for conservation of sacred groves of Meghalaya, India', *Ecosystem Health* 4: 20-31

27. Ibid

societies of North East India. The environmental impacts of jhum cultivation and its role in people's lives have concurrently changed. The state of Mizoram offers an instructive study because of profound changes in people and landscapes in the last century. The state's population has increased from 82,434 persons (4/km<sup>2</sup>) in 1901 to 689,756 persons (33/km<sup>2</sup>) in 1991. The conversion of over 80% of the population to Christianity in less than a century (1894-1994) has dislodged the significant role of superstition and mystique in peoples' relationship with their natural environment. Since the 1950s, literacy rates have increased to over 90% and percentage of the urban population to 46.33%. Agricultural changes include an increase in the gross cropped area from 382 km<sup>2</sup> in 1911 to over 975 km<sup>2</sup> in 1991. A large majority of peoples is tribal and dependent on jhum for its subsistence and livelihood. Considerable influx of immigrants from neighbouring Tripura and Bangladesh has also occurred.<sup>28</sup>

**M**ajor changes in administration of land, forests and regulation of jhum cultivation followed the abolition of chieftainship and the formation of democratically elected village councils in 1954. In the 1960s, bamboo flowering, famine, insurgency, grouping of villages, development of roads and communications, and urbanisation, effected further social changes. All of these altered the peoples' traditional relationships with nature and the magnitude of their impact on the environment.

More recently, an ambitious new land use policy was launched with the basic objective of rapidly replacing jhum cultivation by alternative occupations such as horticulture, terracing, and small-scale industries.<sup>29</sup>

28. D. Singh, 1996, op cit

Between 1990 and 1996, the government spent over Rs 132 crores, which is supposed to have reached over 41,000 beneficiaries.<sup>30</sup> The NLUP can potentially help a large number of families in dire need of better livelihoods in the North Eastern region.

Unfortunately, reliable independent information on the efficacy and implementation of NLUP schemes is lacking. As village councils have not been involved in the design and implementation of NLUP schemes and relatively new notions of individual ownership of land have been introduced, the regulation of jhum appears to be in disarray in many villages.<sup>31</sup> Although it is too early to comment on the success of NLUP, the need for transparent monitoring is obvious.

**T**he people of North East India represent a fascinating variety of cultures. Jhum plays an important cultural role in local customs, traditions, and practices, besides offering economic security to farmers. It would be unfortunate if developmental programmes based on misguided opinions about jhum suppress this unique form of agriculture. Only occupations providing monetary and social benefits perceived by jhumias to outweigh the cultural and security benefits embodied by jhum are likely to gain acceptance. A balanced approach to development that also recognises the merits of jhum is needed. Then, this remarkable form of organic farming may persist into the 21st century.

29. Ibid

30. Data on expenditure under NLUP in Mizoram, 1990-1996, Rural Development Department, Government of Mizoram, Aizawl

31. D. Singh, 1996, op cit

# Himalayan erosion

ARJUN M HEIMSATH

MOUNTAIN environments are especially susceptible to high rates of erosion relative to regions of modest topography. Steep slopes, present and past glaciation, high rainfall intensities due to orographic effects, and sparse vegetative cover help lead to potentially high erosion rates in these regions. In addition to high erosion rates, the processes of mountain erosion are often catastrophic and, as a result, the downhill or downstream effects of mountain erosion are perceived to be severe. The episodic and large scale nature of such processes, and the ruggedness and inaccessibility of the mountain environment, have meant that relatively few studies have quantified mountain erosion rates. This is especially true for the Himalaya.

Despite the relative lack of data, researchers have long contended that human impact on mountain environments increases or adds to the rate of 'natural' erosion. Human impacts on the Himalayan belt of mountains have been particularly widely condemned as the direct cause of high erosion in the region (Eckholm, 1975; Eckholm, 1976; Myers, 1986; Reiger, 1981; Sterling, 1976; Thapa and Weber, 1990).<sup>1</sup> Environmental degradation in the Himalaya is a very real problem, and the enormous impact of the rapidly growing number of people living in the region gives cause for continued

conservation efforts. Attributing the high levels of Himalayan erosion to the human population is, however, not necessarily justified. Conversely, it is not reasonable to suggest that all Himalayan erosion is 'natural' and that there is no need to improve human land use practices.

In this paper, I shall attempt to put both natural and anthropogenic causes of erosion in perspective for the Himalaya through a brief summary of the available knowledge on the topic. In this summary I revisit Ives and Messerli's (1989) theory of Himalayan environmental degradation (referred to here as the *Theory*). They provide a seminal analysis of the range of factors, from the geological to the sociological, that define the environmental state of the Himalaya.

In reviewing their book, Fisher (1990) asserts that the *Theory* has 'become so pervasive that it has obtained the status of a myth, in the anthropological sense that it is a "charter for action", justifying a vast input of foreign aid into reforestation and watershed management projects.'

While other papers question the *Theory* (Byers, 1986; Carson, 1985; Hamilton, 1987; Hofer, 1993; Metz, 1991; Ramsay, 1986), there does not appear to be a significant change in the public perception that human activity is the primary cause behind the landslides and high erosion rates in the Himalaya.<sup>2</sup> The conventional wisdom continues to be that the erosive mate-

1. Papers like these may be partly responsible for the widely held belief that humans are the root of environmental degradation in the Himalaya. However, due to a paucity of empirical evidence, scientists are increasingly cautious in their claims of supercrisis in the Himalaya.

2. Recent articles in *The Hindustan Times* covering the 18 August 1998 landslide in the Kumaon hills that killed over 200 people, as well as other landslides in the region provide

rials and debris that fill reservoirs, foul hydroelectric turbines, strip soil from potential agricultural land, and pose hazards to villages downstream, are the direct fault of the people living on, farming, and exploiting the mountainous land

Here, I shall not analyze the public and land use policies that have been affected by this perception, but do place some rough quantitative bounds on both the natural and human-accelerated rates of erosion. I shall suggest that Himalayan erosion rates are high irrespective of what people do, but that human impacts can have serious local consequences. First, I introduce the natural causes of erosion in mountain environments. Next, I place these within the Himalayan region with a review of the limited studies done there. Finally, I address how land management can affect the natural processes.

Within the scope of this paper it is not possible to examine fully the extent and nature of the removal of vegetation, terrace agriculture, and road construction across the Himalaya. These are the primary human impacts in the region that directly affect erosion rates. Instead, I discuss their general impacts on erosional processes. The major goal of this paper is to review Himalayan erosion rates from a process-based perspective and not to assess the very real effects of environmental degradation caused by humans.

**E**rosion is the removal of material from any landscape and occurs at rates that can be influenced by climatic, tectonic and anthropogenic forces. With the exception of glaciation and periglacial activity, the processes of erosion are similar across landscapes.

examples of conflicting reports. At least three news articles (21, 24, 27 August), one editorial (20 August), and one opinion article (6 Sep-

tember) presented the landslides as being caused by a combination of the natural processes of the Himalaya and the environmental destruction caused by human habitation of the mountainous region. When the Geological Survey report on the disaster was released, *The Hindustan Times* covered the story (30 November) and reported that the geologists 'have ruled out human interference'. Importantly, however, opinion articles (e.g. 17 November 1997), editorials (e.g. 9 February 1998), and news articles (e.g. 4 January 1999, 7 April 1999) stress the impact of humans on the Himalayan forests and environment without drawing conclusions on the causality between human impacts and mountain erosion.

**T**hese observations are, however, purely qualitative and intuitive. Quantification of erosion rates from different landscapes demonstrates that the rates are significantly, and often dramatically, higher in mountain environments (e.g. see review by Saunders and Young, 1983).<sup>3</sup> While studies such as those that Saunders and Young (1983) cite deserve detailed attention,

3. I discuss all rates in terms of landscape lowering, or length per unit time. I use the units millimeters per year, mm/yr, which is the same as 1000 meters per million year, m/Ma, the commonly used units for regional denudation rates. I convert the findings from studies that cite erosion as a some unit mass per land area per time (e.g. tons/hectare/year) to mm/yr by dividing by the bulk density of soil (mass/volume), using the appropriate conversion factors, and the catchment area to get the erosion rate per unit area.

4. I will discuss neither the tectonic and isostatic roles in mountain formation, nor the causes of the Himalayan orogeny. Himalayan tectonics and the geodynamic structures that underlie the region justify longer discussion, such as in Searle (1991). Searle does a clear job of summarizing and quantifying the tectonic forces behind the building of the Karakoram and much of the Himalaya.

It is the scale or rate of the erosional process that varies most noticeably as a function of terrain and becomes greater with steeper slopes. Gravity forces material to move downhill and therefore steeper slopes typically lead to more rapid sediment movement. Steep mountain slopes thus usually experience high rates of sediment movement and more rapid and dramatic erosional processes than low-relief environments. Steep slope processes are more likely to be catastrophic because of the large potential energy gradient between the high and low elevations.

**L**andscape form is dependent on the geomorphic process(es) acting upon it and the material of which it is made. Differences in form point toward differences in the processes dominating the evolution of the landscape. Dominant geomorphic processes responsible for the transport of material down hillslopes include soil creep, solifluction, earthflows, landslides, debris flows, rock falls, and glaciation (see good descriptions in Carson and Kirkby, 1972; Selby, 1982; Abrahams, 1986; Summerfield, 1991). Each process has an associated characteristic form that helps to predict how the landscape is likely to respond to changes in climate or land use.<sup>5</sup>

Whatever material is removed from the slopes must be transported out of the catchment system by rivers or accumulate in the valley bottom, leading to reduced relief and slope in the landscape. Rivers therefore play a crucial role in removing the sediment brought down by hillslope erosion. Glaciers can play a similar role in removing sediment from valleys,

5. For example, a well-vegetated, gently-rounded, soil-mantled landscape might be stripped of its soil mantle and turned into a gullied, badland landscape if the climate changed from humid to arid, killing the vegetation, or conversely, if an increase in rainfall were concurrent with human removal of vegetation. The dominant geomorphic process under such changes may shift from biogenic creep to overland flow or shallow landsliding.



and they also remove material from hillslopes. Arguably, as evidenced by the deeply incised landscapes carved by glaciation, glacial processes are the most effective erosive agents.

Glaciers only occur where snow persists, and are therefore either at high altitudes or latitudes in the current climate. Because glaciation covered about 30 percent of the continental surfaces until only about ten thousand years ago, the geomorphic effects are obvious and significant even in areas where there is no hint of glacial activity today. When a landscape is covered with ice that is moving downslope, the intensity of the mechanisms causing erosion increases. The ice is thick and exerts enormous shear stress on the land surface (equal to the density of ice, times its thickness, times the slope), which is transmitted through particles and rocks entrained in the ice mass. Ice erodes the landscape by directly abrading it with entrained rocks and sediments and by literally plucking pieces of the rock off the ground surface, transporting them and thus removing the material from the hillslopes. In alpine environments the sediments moved by glaciers are typically bedrock boulders that are difficult to erode in a non-glacial regime.

**G**laciers erode hillslope materials and deposit them downslope. The high erosion rates from glaciation then deposit boulders and sediment in reservoirs of material that are 'in storage' in parts of the landscape. These deposits can be quite extensive and become a source for high post-glacial erosion rates, as rivers or landslides reactivate and transport the sediment. We can use these deposits to estimate the average denudation rate from a region. Since the deposits can include material transported by different processes, it is difficult to distinguish specific processes from studies on the

mean denudation rates. Nonetheless, rough estimates of denudation rates for regions under alpine glaciation range from about 1 to 10 mm/yr

**P**eriglacial erosion can also be significant in alpine environments as it may result in the removal or movement of large amounts of material. Specifically, when the soil or regolith is saturated with water that freezes and thaws repeatedly throughout the year, it can flow downslope and therefore erode at more rapid rates than would be experienced without the influence of ice. The term 'gelifluction' refers to frozen ground flow and 'solifluction' refers to soil flow under frozen conditions. The material moved under such processes is typically greater than under non-saturated conditions. Rates cluster around 10 to 100 mm/yr, almost an order of magnitude higher than the mean denudation from glacial regions. However, these rates are likely to be biased because they concentrate only on the parts of the landscape where there are active flow processes.

Periglacial processes can also result in block flows, where angular boulders mantle the slopes or accumulate in the valley bottoms. In the high mountains, both glacial and periglacial processes are likely to have played significant roles in shaping the landscape and contributing to the high levels of sediment being mobilized by contemporary processes.

Landslides, debris flows, and rockfalls are perhaps the most commonly associated processes for the mountains and the frequencies and magnitudes of these processes can be increased easily by environmental destruction. Each of these distinct processes typically involves the movement of large volumes of material at high rates. They are distinguished from other processes of mass move-

ment on slopes by their catastrophic nature and are referred to here as slides. While they all have the immediate appearance of causing large amounts of erosion, it is important in any specific instance to assess both the frequency and magnitude of such processes when determining long term erosive effects. All slides occur when the slope material fails. Failure occurs when the driving force, usually gravity, exceeds the resisting force on the material, which is typically the cohesive strength. These are the processes, along with snow avalanches, that we commonly consider mountain hazards.

Researchers have estimated the average rates of erosion by landsliding across a wide variety of climates and topographic forms (see review by Saunders and Young, 1983). Typical methods for estimating the rates involve measuring the volume of debris moved by the slide and estimating the frequency of occurrence. Determining the latter precisely has proven to be challenging. Current methods of analyses are not sufficient and the range of erosion rates from slides of 0.5 to 10 mm/yr have a great deal of interpretive uncertainty in them.

**S**oil creep and the diffusion of regolith downslope are two processes that continuously transport sediment off soil-mantled hillslopes. While these processes may be imperceptible at any given point in time, their action is likely to be continuous and the cumulative result may become obvious after time. Curved tree trunks (concave uphill), displaced stone walls or pavements constructed on hillslopes, and the accumulation of material upslope of a fence or wall can offer hints to the slow, continuous movement of sediment. This kind of sediment movement is generally done by biogenic activity such as burrowing ani-

mals (ants, worms, gophers, rabbits) and vegetative displacement (roots burrow into the bedrock, the plant or tree falls over, and the bedrock is uprooted into the soil column and transported downhill). The cumulative effect of such processes, while not catastrophic, has a significant impact on any alpine environment with sediment-mantled slopes. Estimates of average erosion rates for landscapes dominated by creep processes suggest rates up to two orders of magnitude lower than glacial and landslide dominated regimes: about 0.01 to 0.1 mm/yr.

**T**he above discussion has described processes that erode the hillslopes and bedrock faces of mountainous regions. River incision or erosion, on the other hand, drives the erosion of the surrounding hillslopes by cutting through the uplifted or uplifting landscape. In general, rivers are cut through landscapes at rates roughly in balance with the uplift rate of the mountains.<sup>6</sup> Landscape erosion caused by rivers involves both the incision of channels into bedrock as well as the downslope transport of sediment. Bedrock incision helps set the relief (the difference in elevation between valley floor and ridge crest) of mountainous regions and remains poorly quantified for any landscape. In regions with high sediment delivery to streams (e.g. glacial, landslide dominated, or recently perturbed by human or climatic influences), rivers form alluvial beds of unconsolidated sediments. Sediment sizes reflect the balance between the transporting stress of the water and the resistance of the bed sediments to movement and are therefore good indications of the dominant flow con-

ditions in alluvial channels. Perturbations in flow conditions, or sediment input, are often observable in such channels.<sup>7</sup>

**A**ll of the erosional processes I briefly introduce above are applicable and important in the Himalaya. There have been relatively few studies that have quantified erosion rates, either those from natural processes or as a direct result of human activity, in any alpine environment and especially in the Himalayan region. The combination of Himalayan-scale terrain, poor infrastructure, and unpredictable collaboration with local governments, have each contributed to why so little is known about the details of erosion in the Himalaya. However, there is strong and continual interest in knowing more about the balances and differences between natural and human-induced processes of erosion in this region and others.

The Himalayan region is an enormous and complex geographical area that stretches across parts of Pakistan, India, China (Tibet), Nepal, and Bhutan. This area could be extended to include parts of Afghanistan, Burma, Thailand, as well as Bangladesh if we consider the entire catchment area affected by and influencing the hydrological response of the Himalayan region. A typical cross-section, from south to north, divides up the Himalaya into physiographic regions and extends from the Gangetic plains, or Terai, through the foothills, or Siwalik, the Middle Mountains, the Greater Himalaya, the Trans-Himalaya, and the high plateau (Tibetan). Transects across the Himalayan belt yields simi-

lar divisions in physiography along its entire length.

**C**haracterizing the Himalaya as a whole is only possible at the most general level. The first-cut division of the region into physiographic zones enables the examination of geomorphic processes across areas that are geographically similar. We could reasonably extrapolate detailed research focusing on landslides in the Middle Hills of Nepal to a similar physiographic region in the Kashmir Himalaya, for example. Conversely, a study of sediment transport in a river flowing through the Terai should not be extrapolated to try to explain the incision of the Indus through the high regions of the Karakoram. While it is likely that the processes of erosion are similar across the physiographic divisions (e.g. landslides are obviously important in the Siwalik, Middle Hills, and the Trans-Himalaya), it is less likely that the magnitude of erosion is similar due to the affects of local relief, climate, land use, and vegetation. Furthermore, studies characterizing the processes of erosion (Bartarya and Valdiya, 1989; Dhakal et al., 1999; Mehrotra et al., 1994) may do nothing to quantify the rates of erosion, and therefore allow no comparison with other regions or processes.

As others (Carson et al., 1986; Hildreth, 1986) have suggested, the Himalayan physiographic regions can be further divided according to their susceptibility to erosion or potential hazard from erosion. Such a secondary division allows us to assign a relative rate to the same erosional process. For example, landsliding may be the dominant erosive force in the Greater Himalaya, but the construction of roads through a particular area increases the susceptibility of that region from 'normal' to 'high'. Dhakal et al. (1999) map the relative

7 For example, if removal of vegetation by humans or fire from the surround hillslopes leads to an increase in the erosion of fine sediments, then a rocky mountainous channel may show layers of silt deposition on the boulders and cobbles.

6 Fluvial erosion and bedrock incision will not be covered in detail here and deserve a separate discussion paper.

hazards in a small, well-studied catchment in Nepal, and show that geology is the factor that contributes most to landsliding. They determined that about four per cent of the Middle Mountains area they focused on was high hazard. They do not, however, determine overall erosion rates from landsliding. It is likely that if researchers conducted a similar study in the Trans-Himalaya or Greater Himalaya (Selby, 1988), the relative proportion of 'high hazard' regions would be significantly higher, as estimated by Carson et al. (1986).

**C**arson et al. (1986) provided examples of how to make a rough assessment of the net sediment contribution to rivers of the different erosional processes and how to estimate the effect of human land use. They used Laban's (1978) estimates of soil loss for different land uses in their Land System and Utilization mapping for Nepal to divide the landscape according to erosion estimates. Carson et al. estimated that regional denudation rates range from about 1.5 mm/yr for degraded scrub forest, to zero for undisturbed forest and irrigated bench terraces in good condition. Comparison of these rates with basin-wide denudation rates estimated from river sedimentation rates (Williams, 1977; Milliman and Meade, 1983; Upadhyaya et al., 1991; Milliman and Syvitski, 1992) suggests that the rates cited by Laban (1978) were especially high (i.e. on the order of 3 to 13 mm/yr) for the degraded range lands. These rates are lower than estimates from the higher regions, but there has been no reliable quantification of erosion rates from the Trans or Greater Himalaya.

Short term studies of erosion rates, especially those carried out on degraded land, can only capture the immediate processes of denudation acting on the landscape. Because the

colluvial soil is produced from the underlying bedrock and from any external inputs of organic matter, there is a limit to the amount of material eroding from the landscape. If the short term rates recorded by Laban (1978) and Williams (1977), or observed by Byers (1986), for example, were acting over long time scales and exceeded the rate of soil production, the landscape form would change from a soil-mantled to a bedrock-dominated landscape. Soil fertility studies for the agricultural regions of the Himalaya underscore this point (Nakarmi et al., 1991; Carson, 1992; Schreier et al., 1994).

**H**uman activity often exacerbates and accelerates the natural processes of erosion, and its potential impacts have been the central tenet of the *Theory of Himalayan degradation*. While the deleterious impacts of road building, vegetation removal, and soil compaction through agriculture may be self-evident, there have been few studies to quantify the hypothesized increase in erosion due to such activities.

Studies examining the impacts of humans have tended to be plot studies measuring local erosion rates from small plots of land under different forms of use (see Upadhyaya et al., 1991; Carson, 1992; Schreier et al., 1994 for examples and other citations). Increased erosion rates from road building have been well documented in the Pacific Northwest of the United States, and have been implicated as one of the most critical human impacts in the Himalaya (Narayana and Babu, 1983; Haigh, 1984; Validya, 1985; 1987; Tejwani, 1987; Haigh et al., 1989). Despite documentation of the significance of road construction in increasing erosion rates, there is no quantitative estimate of how much more sediment is contributed to the

catchment from the increased landsliding caused by road building.

**L**and use can directly effect the occurrence of sliding by changing either the driving or resisting forces acting on the slope material. Altering the slope by cutting or filling for road construction, for example, changes the driving force on the material by changing the contribution due to gravity and can be done by cutting part of a hillslope away to build a road or a building. Modifying or removing the vegetation can change the resisting force by altering the infiltration capacity and rate of the soils. For example, increased soil water may increase the soil pore water pressure, which decreases the effective normal stress and therefore the shear strength of the material. Soil-water, or water on the potential failure plane of a bedrock landslide, can increase with changes in or removal of vegetation and also with changes in the drainage of a catchment area.<sup>8</sup>

Researchers have given more attention to the impacts of 'deforestation',<sup>9</sup> both real and mythical, than to any other human impact in the Himalaya (Eckholm, 1975; Myers, 1986; Froehlich and Starkel, 1993; Hofer, 1993). Similar to the studies on

8 Roads are the primary cause of human induced landslide initiation. A typically constructed mountain road concentrates water into the convergent regions of the landscape. Because these areas are concave upward they have also accumulated sediment from the surrounding hillslopes over time. The increase in water discharged into the area can therefore reduce the shear strength of the material and help initiate a landslide. Concurrently, vegetation removal can lead to root decay, reducing the effective shear strength of the soil mantle (the roots may literally be holding the soil in place on steep slopes) and helping to initiate failure on an otherwise stable slope.

9. See Hamilton (1987, 1992) for a discussion of the ambiguity of the term 'deforestation' and a good summary of the role of forests in protecting the hillslopes from erosion.

the impact of road construction, studies on the connection between erosion and deforestation do not offer accurate measures of how much the erosion rate is being increased by 'deforestation'. Such an estimate for a catchment in the Oregon Coast Range shows that the sediment input from landslides increased twenty times over ten years following clear-cut forestry in the region and that producing such an estimate requires large amounts of funding (Heimsath, 1999).

**A**dditionally, as Hamilton (1987) points out, the term 'deforestation' is rife with emotional connotations and does not address the slope stabilizing effects of well maintained terrace agriculture. Ives (1987) and Carson (1992), for example, show how the hill farmer can stabilize the landscape and potentially lower the net rates of erosion from the steep, Middle Hills landscapes they farm. These studies only serve to add balance to the emotional response that most feel about Himalayan deforestation. In reality, the degradation caused by the cutting of wood for timber and fuel is severe in many of the populated regions of the Himalaya, even if the net contribution to regional erosion rates is relatively small. Local soil loss from landsliding caused by the decay of roots following vegetation removal, for example, leads to declining soil fertility and reduces the areal extent of arable land. This causes encroachment on increasingly marginal land, extending the problem to greater areas. These kinds of impacts continue to be documented.

The fundamental question remains unanswered in the literature, however. That is, are increased erosion rates due to human impacts enough to make a noticeable contribution to the already enormous sediment load being transported out of the Hima-

laya? A rough estimate of the relative contributions of sediment to the major Nepalese rivers suggests that the answer is no (Heimsath, unpublished data).<sup>10</sup>

**T**his paper provides a brief overview of erosional processes in mountain environments, and applies them to the Himalayan context using the findings from the limited number of studies conducted in the region. While more detailed analyses of the erosion rates and processes are required, there are some conclusions we can draw from the limited knowledge we have. The Himalaya are young, rapidly uplifting, and eroding at high rates. If the hillslopes were in a dynamic equilibrium with the uplift rate, the overall denudation rate would be somewhere between 1 and 10 mm/yr. Such rates are widely regarded to be among the highest in the world, along with that of the Southern Alps of New Zealand and the mountains of Taiwan. Because high denudation rates in the Himalaya are likely occurring in the Trans-Himalaya and the Greater Himalaya, physiographic regions sparsely populated at best, it is unlikely that human impacts affect the rates (i.e. have made them significantly higher than 'natural'). These regions have experienced extensive glaciation and are still covered extensively by glaciers that

supply downstream regions with large inputs of sediment.

**T**he Middle Hills of Nepal, where much of the quantitative research has been conducted, are comparable geographically and geologically to large areas of the Indian (Garhwal) and Bhutanese Himalaya. These are the regions where the greatest number of people live and can provide evidence for resolving the relative contributions of humans and natural processes on the rate of erosion. While the local effects of degradation and the stabilizing effects of good land management are relatively well understood, the age-old conventional 'wisdom' that farmers do not necessarily mean higher erosion rates does not seem to be widely accepted by policy makers and land managers. Because studies that have sought to resolve the question of whether humans significantly increase erosion rates have produced uncertain results, acceptance of the now outdated conventional wisdom continues. Scientists have modified their use of drastic terms such as 'supercrisis', 'catastrophic soil erosion', and 'extensive degradation' to describe the state of the Himalayan environment. Ideally the shift in rhetoric will help shift conventional wisdom. It is critical, however, that the shift does not mean shifting attention away from the ever-important efforts of improving land management and conservation practices.

10 The rough sediment budget that I constructed for Nepal was based, however, on studies with enormous uncertainties, rough physiographic divisions similar to those cited in Ives and Messerli (1989), and on the hazards assessment of Carson et al (1986). I therefore do not regard my answer as definitive in any way, although the process of arriving at the conclusion is sound. Constructing a sediment budget for a region involves estimating sources, sinks, and transport mechanisms of sediment across the catchment area. Erosion, deposition, and transport rates must be known and the relative areas of the different dominant erosion types must be estimated. An accurate sediment budget must include detailed field

verification of the geomorphic processes and accurate measures of erosion rates. The conclusion I reached for Nepal was based on a first order budget done entirely from literature review with limited field verification. However, my first order estimate of under ten per cent for the contribution from accelerated rates of erosion due to human impacts strongly suggests that human contributions are minimal. Again, this is simply an overall sediment budget and says nothing about local degradation.

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# Environmental crisis in Nepal

BARBARA BROWER

FOR at least four decades observers have identified Nepal as a crucible of environmental disaster. Each episode of catastrophic flooding in Bangladesh or the Ganges plain renews attention to the problem, usually explained as follows: Hill farmers, pushed by the demands of their growing families and the livestock that supports them, are clearing more and more forest off the steep Himalaya's slopes. Intense monsoon rains falling on these bared hillsides induce landslides, permit accelerated run-off, and charge the Ganga's tributary streams with floodwaters and silt that force the master stream over its banks in cataclysmic floods, leaving human and environmental disaster behind.

This interpretation of the interaction of people and environment is repeated in popular literature, travel guides, academic treatises, government reports, development agency documents, environmentalist tracts, films – almost any genre that takes Nepal as its topic. What wonder, then,

that such an interpretation has been extremely influential in informing conservation and development policy of the last two decades at least.

More recently, a challenge to this model has been raised in response to a growing body of data that fails to support the assumptions of such a scenario. The case against crisis points to insufficient investigation of physical processes, inadequate attention to historical political-economic factors, and deficient understanding of the lives and practices of hill villagers.

The Himalaya are dynamic mountains, actively uplifted and seasonally assaulted by concentrated, intense monsoon precipitation; five kilometres' depth of deposition in the Ganges valley, the accumulating after-effect of such dynamism, indicates an old, old process. Evidence suggests that the bulk of material shed by the mountains and transported by rivers has been derived from large scale landslides caused by underlying geologic weakness or cataclysmic

failures of glacial lakes. These are nature's own mechanisms for maintaining equilibrium; the added increment attributable to human induced deforestation is, according to crisis critics, negligible.

**T**he crisis scenario assumes massive, recent, accelerating deforestation at the axes of peasant farmers. Yet a closer look at historic processes and contemporary practices suggests a different story.

Crisis critics assert that the extent of forest, at least in the hills and mountains, appears substantially unchanged in the last several decades. Some natural forest has unquestionably given way before human demands. But investigators argue that these were the demands not of contemporary hill farmers but of a succession of greedy governments. It was state edicts from the 18th century that forced conversion of forest: tax policies not only compelled farmers to forfeit 50% to 75% of their yields, but also required hill villages to provide charcoal and smelted iron, thus forcing excessive pressure on forested lands remote from regional centres. Crisis critics further argue that more recently, government pre-emption of local claims to forested areas in the name of forest protection have served instead to undermine indigenous forestry and grazing systems and accelerate the degradation of woodland.

Further refutation of the crisis scenario comes from a number of recent investigations of land and resource use practices of the hill farmers blamed for denuding the Himalaya. Villagers are often good land stewards, planning and maintaining their fields so as to minimize erosion, and good at reclaiming slipped fields. A rich array of indigenous strategies for subsistence conservation historically protected rangeland and forest

from unregulated exploitation. When tenure is insecure, as for tenant farmers or on state controlled lands, the motivation and resources for good stewardship may be missing, and of course some of Nepal's farmers may indeed fit the crisis profile. But clearly many hill dwellers are successful managers of fields, pasture and forest.

**C**ritics have been energetic, even gleeful, in debunking some of the myth and explicating the complexity underlying the crisis model. Our grasp of the complexity of human environment interactions in the Himalaya is stronger in consequence, and the questions raised in the context of Nepal have helped to initiate skepticism and re-examination of similar interactions in other regions. But there are, of course, areas of the Nepal Himalaya where too many people exert too much pressure on the lands that support them, with scary consequences. It's not just a matter of nature and history, but of contemporary practices that carry with them environmental consequences. There is a danger in replacing crisis hype with too much complacency, a risk when the satisfaction of critique obscures real issues of human-environment conflict.

So how are we to proceed? If the broad generalizations about environmental crisis in Nepal won't stand close scrutiny, how do we make sense of what's going on? A closer look at a particularly well studied place is a reasonable first step. What's to be learned from a look at one of the most studied and manipulated of places and peoples, the Sherpa's Everest homeland?

In 1976 His Majesty's Government of Nepal created Sagarmatha (Mount Everest) national park, a reserve on the mountain's south flanks. The park encompasses not only the world's highest mountain and

its spectacular sister peaks, but also the lower valleys and interfluvies of Khumbu, homeland of the Sherpa people. The agropastoral Sherpa, famous for exploits on Everest, were an integral part of the park design. They retained claim to private dwellings and fields within its boundaries, but found themselves subject to a variety of regulations brought about by the expectations of the park's new international constituency.

**T**his was the heyday of the Theory of Himalayan Degradation, and the region's forest landscape in particular was considered to be at risk from human use. Sagarmatha's forests were assumed to be degraded remnants of a formerly uninterrupted fir dominated forest landscape, severely diminished in recent times by the collective assault of local people, their livestock, and swelling ranks of tourists. The park immediately began to regulate activities thought to jeopardize the survival of woodlands like wood cutting and livestock grazing. But increasingly there are questions about the extent of the former forest landscape, recency of deforestation, and role of humans and livestock in the present patterns of forest cover: the same set of questions re-opened in the debate over a theory of Himalayan degradation.

The history of environmental research, park planning, and management in Sagarmatha national park reflects the transition from conviction to uncertainty about both the place of people and the workings of the environment that has taken place over the last 20 years, elsewhere in the world as well as in the Himalaya. Khumbu/Sagarmatha national park is especially intriguing for a number of reasons. This is one of several study areas in the Himalaya where misgivings about conventional explanations for

environmental crisis first took root among researchers whose findings were at odds with expectations.

Researchers elsewhere took note and began to explore anew what had seemed to be settled questions about man's role in changing the environment. And the intensity of attention that has been paid to Everest national park since Nepal opened its borders to the West 55 years ago is perhaps unprecedented. Tourists have visited in the tens of thousands; development specialists have flocked here; scholars, too, have been very busy in Sagarmatha national park/Khumbu. Geographers, anthropologists, geologists, foresters, ecologists, biologists, and architects have studied and written about the region, producing everything from magazine pieces based on a two week trek to substantial books grounded in many years' residence. Sherpas themselves write about Khumbu, either in their role as young scholars trained in the West or as representatives of older Sherpa traditions. All these eyes and voices mean a wide array of often contradictory interpretations of the landscape of Khumbu/Sagarmatha national park.

**F**or Khumbu, as for the whole Himalaya, work in the last decade has forced a re-evaluation of the crisis scenario. Repeat photography, forest and range analysis, and oral history all suggest that the condition of Sagarmatha national park forests has been misinterpreted. There is no clear evidence for a significant *recent* reduction in forest cover; only the highest altitude juniper woodland is diminishing. And though the Sherpa's herds of yak and other livestock continue to be targeted as agents of forest destruction, here, too, recent research suggests that assumptions about livestock impacts have obscured the fact that traditionally managed grazing does not degrade

forest. Yet, despite the questions raised in the last decade, the crisis scenario persists as the guiding vision for managing Sagarmatha, and park management premised on assumptions unsupported by facts brings its own environmental and human costs.

**S**herpa livestock have enjoyed pride of place in most explanations of the initial removal of forest and the subsequent suppression of regeneration. That is the message, certainly, in nearly all attempts to come to grips with the dynamic interaction of forests and Sherpas in Sagarmatha national park. In almost every account promoting SNP, in plans for management of the park, and in reports by trained and lay visitors alike who comment upon the status of forests, livestock rank high as culprits in the retreat and degradation of woodland. A New Zealand forester, H.D. Hardie, explained: 'The remaining forest is fast disappearing and will have probably vanished altogether in a few years unless properly protected and managed. . . The main problem... is that heavy grazing by yaks and other livestock destroys all young tree growth through browsing and trampling and thereby prevents natural regeneration of the forest.'

Overgrazing is commonly associated with environmental deterioration, particularly in vulnerable high elevation environments. Yet in such landscapes, where options are severely limited, survival mandates the most careful mediation of human use of nature. This is certainly true for the Sherpa in Sagarmatha. Over many generations of residence as stock-keeping farmer-traders, this group has accommodated to a forbidding environment through careful stewardship of resources, sometimes through explicit conservation mechanisms, more often as a result of the complex

orchestration of land use required to make a living from dispersed mountain resources.

Sherpas live in perhaps a dozen loosely aggregated main villages. Many dozen subsidiary settlements are scattered up slope and down. These serve as toeholds along a gradient of environmental opportunity: intermittently occupied clusters of houses are interspersed with privately owned agricultural fields at different altitudes, each shaped by subtly differing climates, soils, and vulnerability to environmental perturbations. These scattered settlements also function as way-stations for stock keepers, providing the stone huts and walled hay-field/corrals that permit Khumbu Sherpa stockmen access to dispersed communal grazing grounds.

Sherpa stock keepers maintain a bewildering variety of animals. In addition to keeping some sheep, a few may have a horse or two; most, however, are cattlemen who keep yak, a few pure cattle, and a wide array of yak-cattle hybrids. The specialized adaptations to cold and high altitude that distinguish pure yak are passed on, only slightly tempered, in these offspring; cow genes apparently confer some protection against the vector-borne livestock diseases that are a scourge at lower elevations. Yak, cattle, and hybrids produce milk, hair, manure, labour, calves, and other essentials of life in the mountains, for both local use and trade.

**T**he species mix in Sherpa herds means more than diversified product and market options. Genetic diversity is one factor in a spectrum of elements that serve to mitigate the impacts of livestock on the Khumbu environment. As the tolerances to cold and altitude are tuned by genes, so are other aspects of cattle physiology and behaviour. Yak and *nak* show a pre-



ference for high places, and move upslope over the course of a day of range grazing. Pure cows are more reticent, likelier to spend the day close to home, drawn to water more than ridge tops. Adult hybrids seem often to strike a medium, and on a long slope above 3600 metres in September one would be likely to find a stratification from cow to yak that corresponds loosely with altitude.

**T**hus a simple connection of biology and behavior makes for spatial and temporal distribution of animal pressures within a mixed Khumbu Sherpa herd. There appear to be differences in nutritional needs or diet preference as well. Yak are grass specialists, less inclined to browse; cattle by contrast consume shrubby vegetation, too. So the mix of types means a mix of tastes and again a better distribution of demand across a wider range of preferred forage.

More than genetics underwrites Sherpa animal husbandry: the availability of labour and land further shapes livestock management.

Herders have an essential role in Khumbu yak-keeping as in range livestock management anywhere. They must drive stock to new pastures, tend the animals, corral them when it is called for, ward off predators. The dispersed and relatively unproductive high pastures here support family cattle herds of no more than a few dozen animals. Only in winter is it common to combine the stock of several owners; for most of the year each owner must see to his own animals.

For those who are substantially engaged in animal husbandry, livestock management is further organized by land tenure and access to resources. Dozens of subsidiary settlements serve the Sherpa cattlemen. An owner may have holdings in one or a number of settlements. The small

house shelters herders and young animals and stores hay for winter; the hay and potato crops sustain beasts and tenders during winter visits. And access to grazing is contingent on control of property in the satellite settlements. Owners from different home villages share space; among them they regulate access to adjacent grazing, and share the expectation that every owner's livestock will be moved as necessary, abetted by a livestock regulating ritual.

The grazing of Khumbu cattle is further subject to regulatory control by local authorities who set a season of protection, *di*, for territory in the vicinity of villages. Though explicitly intended to address other complex cultural issues, the *di* functions as a rest-rotation grazing system would, excluding livestock and reducing their impact on both forage and the wild-hay crop harvested against winter. When it works (and in the last decade the *di* in most villages had faltered or failed outright because of tourism engendered change in Khumbu economy and society), this ritual regulatory mechanism keeps cattle off lower elevation ranges during the critical summer growing season, adding another element of animal management.

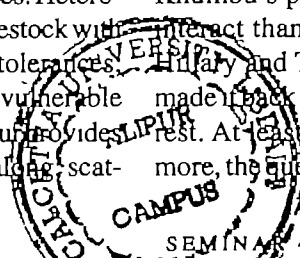
**S**ustainable animal husbandry requires a careful calibration of number of animals, available feed and strategy of management. In Khumbu, a severely constrained high-mountain landscape, a number of factors interact to insure that Sherpa yak and other cattle move continually, covering the widest possible territory, exploiting the widest range of resources. Heterogeneous biology means livestock with different diets, habits and tolerances. Ritual mechanisms protect vulnerable lowland range; family labour provides herders to push the stock along; scat-

tered private properties serve as way-stations in the exploitation of widely dispersed pastures; a community of users, all in the same game, encourages all participants in careful stewardship of the resources on which all depend.

Analysis of forest patches in heavily grazed areas near Khumbu's main villages shows that fir forest grows well in the presence of livestock. Livestock management strategies worked to reduce the impact of people on environment. Sherpa herders have valued not only their herds but the whole environment that supports a way of life, and have managed grazing in this context.

**T**oday, tourism interferes with these strategies, particularly by undermining the *di* and reducing the wide dispersal through time and space so critical to sustainable livestock management, as herders shift to jobs as guides and load-carrying eclipses dairying as the primary function of Sherpa cattle. But neither the ingenuity and effectiveness of the traditional life way, nor the disturbance and response engendered by the changing economics of tourism, are factored into park regulations or the collective understanding of people-environment interaction in the Everest region. And no generalized theory of Himalayan degradation, biased at the outset against livestock, encompasses any piece of this fluid, environmentally tuned but vulnerable system of land use.

Despite hundreds of studies spanning, now, four decades, we know less today about the way Khumbu's people and environment interact than we did when Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay Sherpa made it back from the summit of Everest. At least, though we may know more, the questions have ramified far



faster than answers, and uncertainties remain. If 40 years of close looking brings no resolution of such questions for Sagarmatha, what are the implications for the whole of the Nepal Himalaya?

**S**o what, ultimately, can we say about Nepal's environment? Given the diversity inherent in the physical environment, given the intricate interaction of landscape, history, policy, and human use, and given substantial limitations of information and understanding – even about the most studied places like Sagarmatha/Khumbu – what do we really know?

We know that generalizations about the Nepal Himalaya are of limited usefulness. The Himalaya rise to more than 8000 metres through ranks of lesser ranges from the humid flat lowlands of the Gangetic plain, thousands of streams, rivulets to major rivers, energized by the rapid rise of the ranges, slice the highlands into a finely divided gridwork inimical to easy transit and conducive to high diversity in floral, faunal, and human realms; peoples from source regions north, south, east and west, bearing cultural traditions as varied as our species has devised, filled in the livable valleys and made livable the steep slopes; the nationally integrating, internationally isolating policies of the state forced autonomy while keeping the world at bay until the middle of this century, when the floodgates were opened and an uncoordinated inundation of international development dollars washed over Nepal, bringing at least as much mayhem as benefit. What single rule could hold in such a landscape?

We know that we don't yet know enough about how nature works here, or about how a particular set of practices permit any given group to survive; nor do we understand the

interactions of people and landscape as they have operated through time. And we can only guess about what the future holds. Are we looking at crisis, at the imminent collapse of ecosystem and culture system? Is there a resilience in both people and landscape that will flex to accommodate the pace and nature of the manifold transformations that appear so threatening, now, to so many?

We know that hasty intervention into people's lives and nature's processes can exacerbate the very problems we seek to address. We know that despite its apparent geographic isolation Nepal is as subject to geopolitical processes, to radical social, economic and political transformations, as any other nation on earth.

Nepal, despite an aura of the exotic and international rhetoric long on disaster hyperbole, is something of a microcosm of the whole world. Too many people making too many demands, impelled or encouraged to unsustainable exploitation of the environment by short term government policy objectives and growth addicted economies: these are the factors threatening the global environment almost everywhere, North and South

**T**he uncertainties about how people and nature interact, about the processes and implications of the changing relations between humans and the planetary resources that ultimately support us, are true in any context. We may have better measures of rates of erosion from Iowa cornfields, a clearer notion of the interaction of state policy and citizen response in the more familiar, longer studied context of the North – or we may not. Uncertainty about all such processes and perceptions is, or should be, universal: the more we study, the more aware we become of complexity and diversity. The response to our growing aware-

ness of uncertainty remains a question: Act on the best information available or wait for conclusive data? Intervene with outside expertise or get out of the way of indigenous managers? Advocate a peoples' revolution or firm government control?

**F**inally, there's a concept too often missing from the contemporary discussion of human/environment interaction. It's an old idea, which it has been argued is a northern preoccupation, currently out of favour as ecologically naive, debunked by *Seminar* contributor Ramachandra Guha – the idea of wilderness. Because we can't seem to find it anymore – every corner of the earth now bearing some mark of man – except as a romantic vision, we've written it off. But think a minute about what Nancy Newhall said in her early collaboration with photographer Ansel Adams: 'Wilderness has answers to questions man has not yet learned how to ask.'

Wild nature provided the evolutionary context that shaped us and most other organisms with which we share the planet. We need to remember those roots and be a little careful about dismissing the idea of natural processes proceeding without human intervention. If we can't have pure wilderness anymore, still I think we can't lose sight of the need for places that come close – because we don't have all the answers. We don't know everything about the way the world of nature and man work, together and separately. We don't know the consequences of our actions. We can't always predict what will follow from our choices as managers or politicians or scientists or scholars.

The most important lesson from the discussion about environmental degradation in the Nepal Himalaya is, perhaps, the awareness of our limitations.

# Degradation, sustainability or transformation?

SHARACHCHANDRA LÉLÉ

## Paradise Lost

With deforestation remaining unchecked and solutions failing, the biological treasure trove and lifeline of peninsular India is on the brink of ecological catastrophe.

(Title and blurb of cover story in *India Today* magazine's Independence Day issue, 1995.)

FOREST loss and degradation is a hot topic in the Indian and global environmental discourse, and has been so for quite some time. That there is more heat than light in the deforestation/degradation debate is, I believe, the consequence of three intertwined problems: confusion about what deg-

\* This article is based upon about 10 years of work in/on the Western Ghats region that has been supported by various organizations and

radation means, inadequate ecological work on detecting its presence and identifying the physical processes by which it occurs, and a correspondingly blurred debate about its causes. In this article I present a very personalized account of how I arrived at, or rather stumbled upon, this conclusion. The account is meant to reflect on the sys-

individuals. While naming all of them would be impossible, mention must be made of the academic support of the Centre for Ecological Sciences, the University of California at Berkeley, and the Institute for Social and Economic Change, and the financial support of the Ford Foundation, the American Institute of Indian Studies, the U.S. Man & the Biosphere programme, and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's support over the past five years.

temic and methodological difficulties, not individual failures, in understanding the complex question of forest degradation.

Let me also say that I do not wish to convey that there is no degradation or deforestation occurring in the Western Ghats or elsewhere in India, but that the problem is a multifaceted one that exemplifies the very socially constructed nature of environmental issues, and that requires the application of a rigorous but also self-aware, transparent and pluralistic science to enable us to come to terms with its complexity and move towards solutions

**M**y own exposure to the topic of forest loss and degradation began in my trekking and bird watching days during school and college, and my concern was sharpened and understanding considerably deepened by the very influential Citizen's Report on the State of India's Environment, 1982. I even did some calculations on the value of forest loss due to submergence under hydropower projects for my Masters degree work. But I was exposed to the full complexity of the problem only when I decided to take up my doctoral dissertation research in Uttara Kannada district of Karnataka's Western Ghats region, using the Centre for Ecological Sciences' field station at Sirsi as my base.

I went in with the assumptions that forest degradation in particular and degradation of all biomass resources in general not only existed but was in fact rampant, that several years of research that preceded me had already pinpointed the major causes of degradation, and that I as a systems modeller could facilitate the generation of 'integrated' plans for ecologically sound development that individual solutions to individually identified resource problems might not.

**T**hese assumptions were based upon a series of highly influential studies on Uttara Kannada that emerged from three very different sources immediately prior to my research. These consisted of a technical document published by the Karnataka Forest Department (Reddy *et al.*, 1986), a set of reports published by the Centre for Ecological Sciences (Mani, 1985, Prasad *et al.*, 1985; Mishra *et al.*, 1985; Gadgil, 1987a; Gadgil, 1987b) and a book by an environmental economist and his colleagues (Nadkarni *et al.*, 1989) from the Institute for Social and Economic Change.

The three studies analysed the problem of forest degradation in Uttara Kannada district at various spatial and temporal scales. Common to all of them, however, was a detailed discussion of the forest degradation in the arecanut cultivating region east of the crestline of the Ghats over the previous three-four decades. This region consists of Sirsi, Siddapur and Yellapur talukas and is commonly known as the northern *Malnaad* region. Interestingly, while they differed significantly in their analysis of causes of degradation at the district scale, the role of historical processes and of state forest policy, and while they used rather different ecological data and methods, the studies were unanimous about one point: that there was forest degradation occurring in the northern Malnaad region at an alarming rate

The KFD document used a series of calculations on production and extraction of forest biomass (wood and grass) at the district scale to show how there was a severe 'demand supply gap' in both fuel and fodder that naturally translated into rapidly 'eating into the capital', i.e., a decline in the forest resource base. The CES studies used a combination of similar 'demand-supply calculations' for one village and an index of forest quality based

upon multiple qualitative criteria applied by a panel of experts for another village. The ISEC study drew partly on this multi-criteria assessment, and supplemented it with grassland and forest 'yield' data from questionnaire surveys of rural households and with visual impressions gathered by the researchers during these surveys. And they all came to the same conclusions about the physical phenomenon: the forests in the Sirsi region were degraded and degrading, primarily because of the manner in which they were being used by the villagers.

**I**n explaining why villagers did what they did, the KFD study used the standard combination of Malthusian and ignorance/primitive technology arguments, and called for more afforestation programmes, controls on grazing, etc. The CES studies mentioned the open access nature of the forests. But they focused primarily on the technological aspects of resource extraction and use by the rural households:<sup>1</sup> agricultural practices that involved the import of vast quantities of organic matter from the forest (in the form of green and dry leaves and fodder for livestock that in turn produced dung) to maintain the productivity of the arecanut-spice orchards and paddy lands, the inefficiency of fuelwood use in traditional stoves, and the highly inefficient livestock system that involved large numbers of poor quality animals grazing in the forest but producing very little milk

1 In subsequent papers discussing the forest management history of Uttara Kannada as a whole, CES scientists have also highlighted the role played by the British government's usurpation of traditional systems of forest access, their reservation of the majority of the good forests for exclusive state use, and release of poorer quality forest patches for local use, without the creation of any village level mechanism for proper management, a situation that continued after Independence (Gadgil and Chandran, 1988)

Their recommendations thus included giving timber rights to the villagers (as incentives for better forest management), and technological interventions that would increase resource use efficiency, increase biomass productivity, and increase sustainability: improved stoves, switching to biogas and modern animal husbandry, experimenting with new fodder crops and exotic grasses, afforestation, horticulture, rabbit farming, soil conservation measures, and so on.

The ISEC study focused on the 'political economy' of forest management, and pointed out that only part of the forests in these villages were under open access, with the major portion being under a unique forest tenure called *soppinabetta*<sup>2</sup> privileges. This tenure regime, instituted by the British, gave exclusive individual control of forest patches to owners of historical arecanut orchards in the ratio of nine acres of forest for every acre of areca. With areca-spice orchards being by far the most economically valuable agricultural land use and being the major source of employment for the significant peasant and landless class in the villages, the existing inequalities in agricultural landholding were thus magnified by the forest tenure. The rich areca cultivating elite were thus also the heaviest exploiters of the forest. The study therefore called for the reform of forest tenure, arguing for a shift from open and private access regimes to community control

**A**s I began my dissertation research in collaboration with CES, my first impression about the condition of the forests was no different: the so-called forests in the villages I was studying were a far cry indeed from the lush evergreen, tall and dense for-

ests on the crestline of the Ghats I had trekked through a few years before. They were a mosaic of small dense evergreen groves, patches of medium height, heavily pruned or lopped stands of moist-deciduous species, some looking like 'telephone poles', some with a heavy growth of grass in the understorey and others with dense shrubs, patches with very dense but stunted tree growth dominated by just *Hopea wightiana*, and patches of pure grassland. Intermingled were patches of barren land or land with only shrubs and stumps, and patches of taller denser forest but with wide openings in the understorey.

**V**isits to the villages with CES staff quickly highlighted the physical processes through which this degradation seemed to be happening: massive stacks of stored firewood peeped from the backyards, big logs burned under pots of boiling arecanut, large herds of cattle grazing in the forest, stacks of leaf and twig loppings sat drying under leafless, twigless trees in the forests, and headloads of fuelwood lined up on the main road entering Sirsi town every evening. Village elders whom we visited admitted that they had degraded the forests, and called for more development programmes and increased rights to forests to provide an incentive to better management.

However, after more than a year of analysing existing CES data, doing additional forest sampling and grass productivity studies, and (after improving my Kannada so that I could talk to a larger cross-section more easily) surveying and resurveying households in villages that had not been included in the earlier CES reports, the picture became much more confusing. Many villagers denied that the forest was degrading ('it's been like this for generations'). They

argued that indigenous breeds of livestock were better suited to the climate and terrain and did not trample tree seedlings (as 'their weight is hardly half that of *maidaan* (plains) breeds.' They did not see why tree pruning was necessarily destructive ('don't we all prune trees in our gardens for better growth') and why the 'organic' nature of their traditional leaf manuring practices was not lauded.

**T**he landless were clearly more interested in figuring out how to 'encroach' a patch of forest for cultivation than in conserving an apparently abundant resource that gave them only fuelwood, and even the landed were on the look out for opportunities to expand their cultivated land area into the forest. If deforestation was a concern, it seemed to concern only the forest department, the ecologists, and the village elite, not those villagers worried about issues of livelihood and income.

My confusion gradually coalesced around the three links in the degradation narrative: the definition of degradation, the measurement of its presence, and the explanation of its occurrence. Take the last first. Surely the over exploitation of forests would lead to reduced availability of that resource in the future (possibly near future) to the villagers themselves? And while in open access situations this concern for one's future cannot be expressed, surely the private access *soppinabettas* did not suffer from the 'tragedy of the commons'?

How would one explain the *betta* holders neglect of their own future wellbeing? Was it a case of what neoclassical resource economists had identified as the 'discount rate versus resource renewal rate' problem, viz., that the forest resource grew so slowly that the *betta* holder would be better off over exploiting it for green manure, reaping maximum profits from the

2 In Kannada, *soppu*=leafy matter and *betta*=hill.

thus heavily manured arecanut orchards in the near future and then living off the interest earned on this money than on the 'living interest' from forest or horticultural capital, as was in fact argued in the *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* by two economists modelling betta holder behaviour (Bhat and Huffaker, 1991)?

But although in public betta holders argued that the (very substantial) benefits obtained by them under the soppinabetta privileges were not sufficient incentives for them to comply with the responsibilities attached to the privileges<sup>3</sup>, no economic calculations showed the benefits to be less than the costs.

**A** detailed analysis of the data on vegetation growth and biomass use also refused to converge to simple scenarios of degradation. Productivity of the heavily pruned trees and seasonally grazed grasslands was much higher than earlier estimates (Lélé, 1994; Lélé and Hegde, 1997). Amounts extracted from the soppinabettas were less than total household consumption, as supplies were judiciously supplemented with extraction from state controlled reserve forests or open access areas. Moreover, the large number of species in the forest and the variation in site conditions generated very large uncertainties about any estimate of production, making comparisons with equally uncertain estimates of consumption (averaged over space and time) inconclusive.

3. The privileges consist of exclusive access to twigs, small timber, tree leaves, shrubs, grass, soil, and water from the bettas, including the right to fence/trench around their privileged areas, and the right to get timber from the bettas at a highly concessional rate for domestic use. The responsibilities consist of maintaining at least 100 trees per hectare of more than 30cm girth at breast height and not pruning trees of certain 'reserved' species

**T**he comparison of extraction with production – a strategy very commonly employed in the forest and biomass resource degradation literature – did not always make sense either: how can one 'over extract' (in the sense of annually harvest more than what is annually produced) a grass when all that one can see above ground and cut or graze is at most a years production? How can one over harvest leaf litter from the forest floor? One can only collect what falls. Negative effects of litter removal, if any, would be on soil nutrient content and erosion and hence on the growth of the forest in the (very) long run.

On the other hand, one does not really need very detailed scientific studies to say that the species composition and structure of these heavily used forests is quite different from that of relatively undisturbed 'natural' stands, that in general the use of pruning, grazing and fire promotes the conversion of evergreen forest into moist-deciduous vegetation, and hence if everybody was engaged in such practices, the evergreen habitat in the region would be reduced sharply, and animal, bird or insect species that strongly prefer such habitat would thereby also decline. If therefore, we are trying to save forests primarily to save the diversity of animal, plant and insect life in the region as a whole, then even the most 'sustainable' management of soppinabettas, i.e., management that ensured continuous high levels of production of soppu and other products, would nevertheless be 'degrading'.

Delving into the history of the soppinabetta privileges, the granting of which had generated a furious debate within the British administration in the late 19th century, I found century old echoes of this same confusion. Voelcker, a chemist deputed to look at the state of agriculture in Brit-

ish India, described the forest management practices around cultivation as follows:

I saw cultivators lopping around their own fields... Nor were the trees ruthlessly destroyed, for they were only lopped once in four years. Similarly, some trees are most usefully grown for pollarding... I could not help thinking it was better for the trees thus to yield a triennial supply of shoots for 40 years, than that they should be left alone all the time in order to afford at the close of it one single log of timber... (Voelcker, 1897, para. 169).

**I**n contrast, the Conservator of Forests of Kanara felt that:

The kind of *bet* [betta] that meets one at every turn in the garden tracts consists of open forest of mutilated stems from which the branches have been lopped close to the trunk, and on which fresh shoots are allowed to remain for periods varying from one to, at most, three years. The induration, impoverishment, and degradation of the soil are necessary consequences of such treatment, and in time such land must become utterly barren for all practical purposes of garden owners or foresters (MacGregor, 1894, para. 10-11).

While MacGregor sought to project his concern in universalist terms ('garden owners or foresters'), Voelcker was very clear about the socially constructed nature of what constitutes 'good forestry':

It is by no means the case that timber growing will always be the purpose to which the forest is best suited naturally, or the most desirable one when all considerations are taken into account... What must come to be understood is ... that what the forester is accustomed to regard as 'accessories', such as small timber, firewood, grass, etc. should, in many cases, be the main consideration... Growing of

trees that may be pollarded would do much more good than supplying timber (para. 169).

Not surprisingly, MacGregor's 'science' led him to a dire prediction: This distressing landscape, ever present to the traveller in the garden tracts of Sirsi, Siddapur, and Yellapur, has forced me to the conclusion that the garden business is being overdone, and that *ruin and desolation* will be the outcome of a continuance of the present state of things.

**Y**et, one hundred years later, this same 'garden business' continues to flourish in the same Sirsi-Siddapur-Yellapur region. And the same soppi-nabettas that had roused MacGregor's ire are now the focus of distressed attention of his heirs, the Karnataka Forest Department: Nearly 70% of betta lands are in degraded condition, and have become grass lands instead of being covered by useful trees (Reddy *et al.*, 1986).

But many of these very 'degraded' patches are carefully fenced off every year around August by the betta holders to prevent their own cattle from grazing in them as the local *karada* grass grows luxuriantly and is harvested by hand in late November or early December and stored to meet the fodder requirement in the lean summer months.

Clearly, it is not just imperfect data or methods, but the very ideology that values a particular vegetation form and the corresponding land use over others that is at fault. The ideology pushes the forester or ecologist to look for and find degradation no matter how limited the evidence of continuous decline in (say) production. Degradation occurs by *definition*, not by observation, because the observed land use and the value it serves is at odds with one's own values. Conversely, land use types that we

are conditioned to think of in benign terms ('verdant', 'green', 'beautiful') are equally unthinkingly merged with 'natural forests' that harbour much greater levels of biodiversity.

The journalist writing the *India Today* article quoted at the beginning expressed great shock at the 'fact' that forest cover in the Western Ghats has dropped from 'more than ... 60% in the 1950s ... to 38% today.' But he blithely goes on to state that the hill district of Kodagu has more than 80% of its area under 'some of the best [evergreen and moist-deciduous] forests in the world' and in the same breath says that 'coffee and cardamom grow luxuriantly on its slopes as do oranges and pepper', when in fact it is this 'luxuriant growth' of coffee plantations that has doubled in area in about three decades. Today it accounts for nearly half of the tree cover in the district, and is the source of tremendous concern for wildlife and 'natural forest' lovers. It is this expansion of coffee cultivation, and not the smuggling of timber as the journalist claims (which is felled mostly by the same coffee growers) that accounts for most of the loss of 'natural' forest in Kodagu.

**M**y reconstructed narrative of forest degradation in the northern Malnaad<sup>4</sup> combines several of the insights from the earlier CES and ISEC studies with additional spatial and temporal data (including data from CES' long term monitoring) within a more systematic and inter-linked framework for defining, measuring and analysing degradation. It starts by pointing out that forest degradation can be defined only with reference to some 'desired' state of the forest, that this desired state varies from one social group to another, even within the village and certainly bet-

4 Lélé (1993).

ween 'villagers', 'timber focussed foresters' and (say) 'wildlife lovers'.

**I**t then chooses to focus on a particular definition of this desired state that is preferred by the majority of the rural population of northern Malnaad, viz., a forest that maximised production of fuelwood, fodder, leaf manure and small timber without requiring too much investment in production or regeneration (and hence depends upon natural processes rather than planting), and seeks to understand the extent and causes of departure from this desired state across the landscape that is used by the villagers.<sup>5</sup>

Ecologically, it then appears that this landscape is a patchwork of a few rapidly degrading or degraded areas (barren or with only shrubs or stumps) and large areas of systematically harvested dense stands or tree savannas or pure grasslands that are producing the desired twig, leaf and grass biomass at high levels and appear to be sustainable at least in the short run.<sup>6</sup> It also has several areas of unsystematically harvested stands where there is a serious shortage of regenerating tree saplings, and some patches where denser trees stand have clearly been or are being converted purposefully into tree savannas or even pure grasslands by the users.

Socially, this mosaic of degradation, sustainable use and land use transformation is explained by a combination of economic, institutional, locational and other factors. Overall, severe degradation is limited to open access areas that are close to town-

5. That the very boundaries of this 'supporting, uncultivated landscape' may be slowly changing as an expanding population of landless or marginal peasant feels the need for bringing land under cultivation is another story, again not of degradation per se, but of conflicting land use interests

6 The possibility of long run declines in soil fertility could not be ruled out

ships and accessible from main roads and hence subject to urban fuelwood headloading pressure;<sup>7</sup> in a few cases this pressure even spills into private-access soppinabettas. There are also a few soppinabetta patches that suffer degradation from lack of interest (or disputes) among betta holders in demarcating boundaries of individual control.

**T**hat the majority of soppinabettas are not degrading rapidly is in accordance with the high economic value of arecanut plantations and the strong link between arecanut and livestock productivity and leaf manure, mulch and fodder inputs from the forest. And the occasional conversions of dense stands to tree savannas or grasslands are a response to changing fodder-fuel requirements and household endowments, as one finds an inverse relationship between the area of soppinabetta lands that is converted to grassland by a household and its access to other sources of fodder, such as ownership of paddy straw yielding croplands.

Where there is a discernible decline in twig and leaf production of soppinabettas without intentional change in land use, it is caused by either increased fuelwood pressure in households with limited betta holdings, increasing numbers, inadequate resources to switch to biogas and no access to state forests, or by increased lopping frequencies that are driven by the expansion in area under areca orchards, an expansion directly related to the highly remunerative price of arecanut and encouraged by governmental policies towards horticulture

'development'. Finally, the more subtle degradation through removal of tree saplings or young trees occurs in state controlled or open access forests, an indication of the expanding demand for fuelwood and small timber and the lack of any institutional mechanism to meet this demand sustainably.

Similarly, grazing induced declines in grass production are mostly confined to open access areas around towns or settlements, and are not related to burning or grazing practices followed in privately owned or controlled lands. The impact of grazing on tree regeneration is poorly understood. But assuming that there is some negative impact, one finds that all year round free grazing is in any case not the preferred livestock management option of any household. Most prefer a mix of open grazing during the monsoon (where grass growth in the understorey reduces the chances of animals browsing on tree seedlings anyway), and the ability to stall feed the animals depends directly upon the household's control over fodder producing lands (grass or paddy) or availability of cash income for fodder purchase.

**T**o summarize, any analysis of forest degradation must start from an obvious yet often overlooked point, viz., that forests provide a multiplicity of products (fuelwood, fodder, manure, timber), ecosystem services (soil conservation, hydrological regulation, habitat for wildlife, carbon sequestration, aesthetic or spiritual value) that are shared by a multiplicity of beneficiaries residing at varying distances from the forest (constituting local, regional, and global communities), and that these benefits – products and services – cannot be simultaneously maximised, and are sometimes in direct conflict with each other and

certainly with other beneficial uses of the land that we choose to term as 'non-forest'.

**T**he terms 'forest degradation' or the supposed 'social loss' due to deforestation are value loaded social constructs,<sup>8</sup> whose scope and very acceptability as a valid description of what is happening on the landscape depend critically upon who is doing the talking. Thus, any enquiry must at least explicitly say in which and hence in *whose* terms it is choosing to assess forest or land cover change; more generally, the assessments should be done using several alternative definitions.

The ecological enquiry into the existence of any form of degradation requires firstly that assessments of vegetative and ecosystemic impacts or outcomes be in terms of variables closest to the values being assessed. For example, production must be measured not in terms of undifferentiated 'tonnes of total biomass'<sup>9</sup> but in terms of each 'useful' or relevant biomass type in the specific socio-ecological context. Second, conclusions of secular declines in the production of socially useful biomass types would have to be drawn carefully, using as much time series data as possible, taking into consideration the great diversity of species and local conditions, and incorporating the effects of complex traditional harvesting and management practices. The latter requires an understanding of 'disturbed' or 'manipulated' forest ecosystems – such as the effects of

8 As is the currently fashionable opposite of degradation, viz. sustainability – see Lélé and Norgaard (1996)

9 This is exemplified by the classic confusion between ecologists' definitions of production, which is net primary production, and foresters' definition of production in terms of net annual increment, which is net primary production minus litterfall (including whole tree mortality), Satoo and Madgwick, 1982

7 A CES report (Prasad *et al.*, 1987) and the KFD study had both highlighted this pressure from urban fuelwood consumption. But the Western Ghats Forestry Project of the KFD did not incorporate any concrete action on this front.



logging or grazing in humid forests, a science very much in its infancy, falling betwixt the forest ecologists' traditional obsession with 'natural' or 'climax' communities and the foresters' excessive focus on timber and softwood production for urban/industrial use.

**F**inally, the social causes of 'degradation' will include situations of simply conflicting land use interests, situations of short term gains but long term losses for the same interest group, and changing interests of a group over time as its relationship with the forest changes. Arriving at adequate explanations will therefore require the removal of the blinkers imposed by conventional social science 'disciplines' that seek only one of economic, institutional, political, technological, cultural, or Malthusian explanations of human interactions with nature. And if these explanations are to be socially acceptable and are to inform the discourse, they will have to be explicit about the value judgements underpinning their analyses.

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# Misunderstandings of Sahelian land use ecology

MATTHEW TURNER

THE Sahelian region of West Africa has played an important role in the history of international environmental conservation. The Sahelian drought and famine during the early 1970s invoked broad international concern about the threat of environmental degradation in rural areas of the developing world (Gorse and Steeds 1987).<sup>1</sup> This concern has only deepened over subsequent decades to the point where it dominates international development agendas for resource poor regions such as the Sahel (Turner n.d.). The Sahel is now commonly used as a benchmark of excessive resource poverty and environmental degradation to which other vulnerable areas are compared (Middleton and Thomas 1997) and an example of the destabilization effects of severe environmental degradation on political institutions (Homer-Dixon, Boutwell, and Rathjens 1993; Kaplan 1994).

Academic research has identified institutional failures and social mechanisms that contribute to human-

induced environmental degradation in the Sahel (Picardi and Siefert 1976; Franke and Chasin 1980; Bernus 1984; Sinclair and Frywell 1985; Glantz 1987; Bromley and Chavas 1989; Mortimore 1989). Since the mid-1980s, considerable advances have also occurred in the application of remote sensing for environmental monitoring in dryland areas such as the Sahel (Justice and Hiernaux 1986; Franklin 1991; Hutchinson 1991; Tucker, Dregne, and Newcomb 1991; Marsh et al. 1992; Fuller 1998).

Despite three decades of development attention and academic study, there remains considerable confusion about the nature of environmental change in the Sahel. Physical scientists are increasingly able to document changes in vegetative cover over broad areas but have been much less successful in understanding physical processes behind these changes, especially those influenced by human land use. Without more processual knowledge, physical scientists can say little about the persistence of the vegetative cover changes they document and their 'land use ecology' simply relies on searching for correlations between such changes and readily available social data (e.g. population density). The stagnation of the desertification literature around arguments for and against climatic or human causes of environmental degradation are symptomatic of this conceptual/methodological deficit.

On the other hand, social scientists' institutional, behavioural, or

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<sup>1</sup> The Sahel is defined here as the strip of land lying south of the Sahara desert that receives 100-600 mm of rainfall on average per year. Concerns about environmental change in the Sahel and other dryland areas in Africa are not new and have long dominated European perceptions of the region (Swift 1996, Ribot 1999). Colonialist concerns about the environmental consequences of indigenous land use practices led to coercive soil conservation, forestry, and destocking programmes (Baker 1984; Beinart 1984, Anderson and Grove 1987, Grove 1994). Still, the globalization of environmental concern and conservation practice since the 1970s is a new phenomena (Buttel and Taylor 1994).

structural models are able to explain how various socio-economic factors affect human land use but are unable to establish how changes in land use may lead to persistent environmental change. As a result, physical and social scientific literatures on the social-environment nexus in the Sahel remain isolated and in their isolation, inadequate.

This paper is concerned with the void that lies between existing social and physical analyses – namely, our limited knowledge about the ecological consequences of human land use practices or *land use ecology*. Grazing ecology in the Sahel will be the primary focus but the general points are relevant to other land uses in the Sahel and other dryland regions. The first section of the paper will briefly characterize conventional views of range management and grazing-induced environmental change in the Sahel. It will be argued that these understandings have been shaped more by rigid adherence to inappropriate ecological models, developmentalist agendas, and state interests than by good science. This will be followed by a section that discusses how results from more process oriented grazing ecology research leads to different conceptualizations of grazing induced environmental degradation and management interventions.

**D**espite 30 years of heightened concern about overgrazing in the Sahel, our understanding of its grazing ecology remains limited (Dodd 1994). Our ignorance is in large part a legacy of the reliance by range management experts on succession-climax models of range dynamics, whether they worked within North American range science, systems ecology, or French phytosociological traditions (Braun-Blanquet 1932; Boudet 1975; Stoddart, Smith, and Box 1975; Pratt

and Gwynne 1977; Breman and de Ridder 1991). Since the range system was seen as naturally prone to evolve toward an internally regulated equilibrium or 'climax' type, the goal of management was simply to identify the deviations from the desired community type (which may differ from the climax) and recommend changes in management that would move the system in the desired 'direction'.

**A**s described by Westoby et al. (1989), both grazing pressure and poor rainfall were seen as producing changes that move the rangeland away from the more productive state. But since only the stocking rate (i.e., the number of animals per unit area of pasture) can be controlled through management, the proper management response to poor range condition, no matter its cause, was destocking. The beauty of this framework was its seemingly facile application to different socio-ecological situations – management prescriptions could be made without performing controlled studies on grazing impact nor with an understanding of the existing livestock management.

As a result, only a handful of controlled/semi-controlled grazing studies have been performed in the region (Valentin 1985; Grouzis 1988; Hiernaux and Turner 1996) and the relevance of stocking rate prescriptions to mobile livestock production systems (such as the transhumance or seasonal migration practiced by several pastoral communities in the region) have not, until recently, been scrutinized (Bartels, Norton, and Perrier 1993; de Leeuw and Tothill 1993; Turner 1993).

The destocking prescriptions made by range managers, while never rooted in a causal analysis, were understandably interpreted by the development community as diagnoses of

overgrazing. Such diagnoses made sense to the casual observer for explaining widespread deterioration of grass cover, tree and shrub mortality, declines in the abundance of perennial grasses, and increases in the abundance of short-cycle forbs that occurred during the 1970s. Coincident declines in livestock populations coupled with popular notions of what overgrazing means, seemed to confirm that domestic livestock populations were literally eating all of the vegetation available before starving for lack of cellulose.

Social commentators offered various versions of the 'tragedy of the commons' scenario to provide logical explanations for the seemingly illogical behaviour of Sahelian livestock owners (Picard and Siefert 1976; Sinclair and Frywell 1985). It was only a few anthropologists who raised the point that the same symptoms could be caused by the recurrent droughts in the region since the 1970s (Hjort 1982; Sandford 1982; Horowitz and Little 1987). Their voices were lost within a development community operating in crisis mode.

**I**n short, the narrative of widespread overgrazing in the Sahel served many interests and therefore alternative explanations were not seriously considered (Roe 1991; Ferguson 1994). From the researchers' point of view, the relevance of socio-economic research on factors shaping resource use would decline if resource uses were not found to be as ecologically damaging as presumed. Developers welcomed an environmental rationale to rationalize rural production systems. More fundamentally, they were and are in the 'can do' job of development – accepting the possibility that human tragedy in the Sahel is more a legacy of its geography and less of mismanagement is difficult to accept (Escobar

1995). The overgrazing diagnosis was treated by Sahelian governments as scientific support for political programmes of centralization, villagization, and restrictions on human mobility.

**T**he succession-climax models, which identified the need for destocking without on-the-ground ecological research, have come under attack in the 1990s (Ellis and Swift 1988; Westoby, Walker, and Noy-Meir 1989; Laycock 1991; Behnke, Scoones, and Kerven 1993), reflecting the general questioning in ecological sciences of equilibrium based models (DeAngelis and Waterhouse 1987; McIntosh 1987; Botkin 1990; Zimmerer 1994). In an African dryland context, relaxation of equilibrium assumptions has led to a greater appreciation of the strong influence of rainfall variability on rangeland parameters; the multiple and divergent effects of grazing and drought on rangelands; and the resiliency of annual grasslands to both drought and grazing. No longer is the adjustment of stocking rate seen as a necessarily effective response to changes in range condition.

However, the introduction of non-equilibrium ecological perspectives does not, as some popular accounts suggest, lead toward conclusions of a benign influence of grazing or a hands-off approach to range management. Instead, it requires closer study of plant growth factors and how their spatio-temporal distribution are affected by different patterns of livestock actions (defoliation, selective grazing, excretion, trampling etc.) particular to Sahelian management systems.<sup>2</sup>

**A**n unfortunate legacy of range science as practiced in the Sahel is our continued ignorance of the Sahel's grazing ecology. We know surprisingly little about the ecological effects of the grazing patterns that are typically produced by different management systems in the Sahel. In this section, I would like to briefly outline major management-relevant features of what we do know about the productive ecology of Sahelian grasslands, the evolution of Sahelian grazing systems, and the ecological effects of different livestock actions. These are not presented in all of their complexity but instead are only sketchily developed in the spirit of providing a framework for research, management, and development action.

The Sahel receives on average 100-600 mm of rainfall a year during a three-four month rainy season. In any one place, rainfall varies tremendously from year to year. The magnitude and timing of rainfall will affect both productivity and species composition of the annual grassland. Therefore, rainfall should be considered as the major factor affecting interannual variation in vegetative parameters. The Sahel is also a region with very infertile soils. As a result, vegetation is multiply constrained by the scarcity

of growth factors, most notably soil moisture, nitrogen, and phosphorus (Penning de Vries and Djitéye 1982).

The importance of nutrient availability as limiting vegetative production is strongly affected by rainfall. In good rainfall years (400 mm), there is greater potential for nutrient availability in soils to limit rangeland production (Penning de Vries and Djitéye 1982). Annual grasses and forbs have historically dominated Sahelian rangelands. The growth cycles of these plants range from three weeks to three months. A large fraction of a plant's nutrients are translocated to seeds, seed drop is rapid, and seeds are wind or animal dispersed. Once seeds are dispersed, grazing of vegetative material by ungulates or termites will only affect litter cover and soil exposure at the beginning of the following rainy season (if rangeland is not burned).

**H**istorically, a large fraction of Sahelian livestock were managed in transhumance systems that involved the movement and dispersal of livestock over the vast northern pastures (100-300 mm/yr) during the rainy season followed by a return to pastures and cropland to the south after the drying of northern pans at the beginning of the dry season. This general pattern of regional mobility resulted in any one site during the rainy season experiencing short periods of severe defoliation pressures followed by periods of relatively limited grazing. Along transhumance corridors, grazing pressure generally declined with distance from encampments located in proximity to water points. Shifts in the livestock ownership, agricultural encroachment on transhumance paths, military conflict and banditry in the north, and despecialization of livestock husbandry as an occupation has led to a decline in the prevalence of

ticular attention to the proximate biophysical factors (e.g. seed stock, nutrient availability, defoliation pressure, moisture availability) affecting its species composition and productivity (b) Variations in grazing management in the region and how these variations affect the pattern of livestock actions (grazing, trampling, excretion) that can affect the ecologically important proximate factors above (c) The long term and short term effects of variations in the timing and magnitude of livestock actions (relevant to the management system) on forage growth factors. This understanding will develop best through experimental work (grazing trials, exclosures, gradient analyses, clipping studies etc.)

These areas of research remain only partially developed (especially b and c) and poorly integrated

2 An understanding of any region's grazing ecology requires research in at least three areas: (a) The production ecology of the forage resource (grassland, shrubs etc.), with par-

transhumance and a growing fraction of livestock grazed year-round near permanent villages in the southern Sahel.

**O**ne major conceptual problem blocking the development of a more dynamic understanding of Sahelian rangeland ecology is the common treatment of grazing pressure as a singular, aggregated stress on particular vegetative parameters. For example, popular perceptions view grazing as influencing vegetation simply through direct consumption (e.g. defoliation). Grazing in fact involves a range of livestock actions that can influence any vegetative parameter (vegetative cover, species composition, etc.) through multiple pathways (Vale 1982).

Once one distinguishes these pathways and determines their relative importance in different situations, one can gain a better understanding of the dynamic and spatially differentiated nature of grazing on rangeland vegetation (Turner 1999a). Three major proximate factors affecting the productivity of Sahelian rangelands on sandy substrate are photosynthetic surface area, species composition, and soil nutrient availability. These proximate factors are affected by grazing at different spatial scales through pathways working at different time scales.

Grazing-induced defoliation affects vegetation in small patches (around 10 m<sup>2</sup>) and within the same season. Clipping studies have found that the defoliation has to be severe and throughout the rainy season to significantly affect grassland production (Hiernaux and Turner 1996; Turner 1999c). Such defoliation pressures are likely to be generated by village based sedentary management when animals graze highly circumscribed pastures throughout the rainy season. Livestock affect nutrient availability

primarily by consuming vegetation and then depositing dung and urine (which contain a significant amount of nitrogen and phosphorous) across the landscape. This leads to a spatial redistribution and, in the case of nitrogen, a net loss of these nutrients.

In contrast to the defoliation effects of grazing, grazing patterns in the Sahel affect nutrient availability at larger spatial scales (around 50 km<sup>2</sup>) over many decades (Turner 1998a; Turner 1998b). Still, such gradients in soil parameters have been found to affect species composition to a greater extent than recent defoliation pressure (Turner 1999c)

**A**s mentioned above, significant advancements have been made in the monitoring of dryland vegetative cover over the past three decades. Monitoring studies have generally found vegetative cover in the Sahel to fluctuate tremendously from one year to the next, with fluctuations largely driven by rainfall (Tucker, Dregne, and Newcomb 1991). Areas of persistently lower vegetative cover are located around larger villages and towns. The findings of these studies are consistent with the results of field studies that find Sahelian grassland production to be resilient to drought and grazing (Hiernaux, Diarra, and Maiga 1988; Hiernaux 1995; Turner 1999c). It is in areas where livestock are grazed year-round within highly circumscribed pastures that reduction in vegetative cover and shifts in species composition become most evident.<sup>3</sup>

This pattern of vegetative change, as interpreted by the findings of the latest grazing ecological work

3. Still, there remains considerable confusion about the importance of grazing in leading to more persistent changes in grassland soils and vegetation. With very little work focused on the interaction of rainfall and grazing initiated changes in soils and vegetation, scientific discourse has stagnated around the dichotomy of

in the Sahel, argues for changes in the resource management strategy that dominates rural development in the Sahel. Conventional rural development has focused on reducing regional livestock populations. Concern about overgrazing has been translated into development actions to encourage herd offtake (culling), reduce human population growth, and privatize common rangelands. But the latest grazing ecological work shows the annual grasslands are in fact highly resilient to drought and grazing and that grazing induced degradation is highly localized where livestock movements are restricted.

**T**herefore, while standard development actions may improve the situation on a North American ranch, they are clearly insufficient and even damaging in a Sahelian context. Reduction in the size of livestock herds may actually lead to greater concentrations of livestock around market towns, exacerbating ecological problems (Ensminger 1992; McPeak 1999). The relevance of social models, such as 'tragedy of the commons', that have been built to explain the 'overstocking' of rangelands is suspect once one considers Sahelian grazing ecology. The parameters of greater relevance are those that affect the distribution of livestock on available rangeland such as the availability of herding labour (Turner 1999b) and social and physical barriers to herd movements.

Given the present situation where the social organization of graz-

drought versus grazing as the major factor behind changes. What becomes clear from more process-oriented range ecological research is that grazing effects are highly contingent on rainfall (Turner 1998a; 1998b) since rainfall determines the relative importance of different growth factors in limiting production. The same livestock action will have remarkably different effects on the vegetation depending on rainfall and recent rainfall history.

ing is increasingly in the form of an impoverished group of professional herders herding the livestock of the rich on agriculturally encroached pastures, strong measures by national governments, non-governmental organizations, and local communities are required to reinvigorate livestock mobility/dispersion. Embracement of indigenous knowledge by recognizing the rationale behind transhumance systems is insufficient given present structural constraints.

**T**he development of a land use ecology requires an understanding of not only the productive ecology of the resource in question but of local resource management and how it affects spatial and temporal patterns of land use. Improved understanding of anthropogenic environmental change on Sahelian rangelands is hindered by our ignorance of their land use (grazing) ecology. This ignorance does not result simply from the complexity of Sahelian ecology but has been produced by a mutually reinforcing set of conditions including: rigid adherence to inappropriate ecological models by range experts, developers' interest to transform indigenous production systems; and the political interest of national governments to limit the movements of people and animals within and across state boundaries.

Compared to other rural regions of the South, the Sahel has received long term sustained conservation attention. The intellectual, moral, and political failures which underlie the

limited success of resource management approaches in the Sahel are undoubtedly common throughout the Third World. Conventional approaches in the applied ecological sciences of North America and Europe (range management, forestry, wildlife management) mislead as much as they guide the development of proper resource management strategies in the tropical Third World situation.<sup>4</sup>

**T**he confusion caused by the rigid adherence to such management templates provides a greater opportunity for those with power to use environmental analysis for political ends and for developers to argue for production systems that mimic those of the temperate West. Much more work is needed to develop land use ecologies that are relevant to Third World land use practices and the tropical ecologies on which they depend.

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4. For example, the simple adoption of North American forestry principles to a tropical forest situation may be highly misleading, not only because of the different production ecologies of temperate and tropical forests, but also because people in tropical forests may harvest parts of trees rather than whole trees. Conventional forestry science provides few tools for understanding ecological effects of such land uses (Léle 1994).

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# Webs of power: forest loss in Guinea

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THIS paper examines the contrast between the formulation of problems in development policy, and the perspectives of villagers whose views have been subjugated and everyday activities criminalised, within this formulation. We attempt to identify the conditions in which certain demonstrably false ideas about environmental change have come to acquire validity in policy circles, while others, more correct and espoused by inhabitants, have been excluded from consideration and investigation.

Several authors have recently spotlighted the presence of particular

off-the-shelf 'narratives' current in development institutions, which come to define development problems and justify interventions, particularly in conditions where data is poor, time is short, national agendas are overruled and local consultation impossible (Hoben 1993; Roe 1991, 1995). Narrative construction is the stuff of synthesis overview writing within development agencies and policy research institutes, and of inter-agency analytical alignment in development approaches. Narratives help decision makers to fill confidently the gap between ignorance and expediency.

With the spotlight on the narrative, less attention has been given to the ways that the discursive processes which condition narrative construction also condition the knowledge produced about development problems, including the generation of credible 'data' – often in large amounts. Adherents to the environmental degradation view explored in this paper consider

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that abundant evidence supports their conviction. Furthermore, focus on these narratives encourages analysis to treat the relationship between international and local agendas as one of dislocation, divided by a gulf which the increasing use of development-institutionally acceptable research methods, apparently responsive to local concerns, might help to bridge. Less attention is given to ways that different sections of local society become involved in the discursive processes in which development policy knowledge is produced. Such involvement may have developed over long periods, given that present development concerns frequently build on old debates which have already been incorporated into local political processes.

**E**nvironmental issues are pertinent in this respect because of the degree to which environment has become a dominant development concern. They particularly invite critical analysis because of the clarity with which global issues and constituencies, as well as local ones, are involved in defining and responding to the development problem. The analysis summarised in this paper (for a detailed treatment see Fairhead and Leach 1996a) adds to a number of recent historical and social anthropological analyses which have falsified the readings of environmental change that have been driving development policies, revealing major contrasts between external perspectives and locally experienced realities.

Contrasting definitions of the environmental problem contain particular images of local practices and justify contrasting development paradigms, commonly amounting to repression of, as opposed to support to, local techniques and institutions (Behnke and Scoones 1991; Thompson *et al.* 1986; Tiffen *et al.* 1993; cf.

Leach and Mearns 1996). The case considered in this paper concerns ongoing savannisation of tropical forest which is not, in fact, taking place.

**T**he vegetation of Guinea's Kissidougou prefecture reflects its position in West Africa's forest-savanna transition zone, consisting of patches of dense, high semi-deciduous rainforest dispersed in savanna. The forest patches, which surround old and new village sites, have been considered by environmental policy makers for at least a century as the last and endangered relics of a once extensive natural forest cover now destroyed by local farming and fire-setting; a destruction they have continually sought to redress. But the experiences of most of Kissidougou's Kissi and Kuranko inhabitants, as well as archival and air photographic comparisons, do not support this view. Instead, they show forest islands to be the result of human management, created around villages in savanna by their inhabitants. They also show the woody vegetation cover of savannas to have been increasing during the period when policy makers have believed the opposite (Fairhead and Leach 1996a, 1996b).

West African vegetation maps, which show vegetation zones in more or less horizontal bands, easily lend themselves to interpretation as temporal, as well as spatial transitions. Whether from desertification, Sahelianisation or savannisation of forest, observers have been tempted to see each zone as the anthropogenically degraded derivate of a prior vegetation type. On many maps, the forest-savanna transition zone is marked explicitly as a 'derived savanna', or ex-forest zone. And in Guinea, policy makers since the turn of the century have been convinced of this southwards shift, with the conflation of spatial and temporal transitions in-

corporated into the scientific canon informing national and regional environmental policy.

The first forest reserves established in Kissidougou in 1932 were conceived of as a protective 'curtain' to halt the southwards spread of fire and farming induced savannisation. In 1993, the same conflation of spatial with temporal zones provided the 'logic' for a major donor funded environmental rehabilitation project to take 40 Kissidougou farmers on a journey to northern Mali to see the future of their own landscape should protective measures not be undertaken.

**W**ithin each vegetation zone, the iconography of spatio-temporal shifts on the vegetation map is complemented by the iconography of 'divergence from a climax vegetation type': the notional maximum vegetation which could exist given climatic conditions. This contains the idea of the previous existence of a 'bigger' and 'better' vegetation type 'prior to human disturbance', and closer to the 'Eden' which Africa's environment so often represented in colonial imaginations. In this way, present conditions in each vegetation zone may be envisaged as the anthropogenically degraded derivate of its predecessor. And so in Kissidougou, climate (annual rainfall levels over 1600mm) and the presence of humid forest species and patches are taken as indicative of high forest potential and hence of its past existence.

The assumption of anthropogenic degradation of a prior natural forest formation was integral to the first delineation of West African vegetation zones in the early colonial period by the botanist Chevalier. This analysis was transferred directly into contemporary policy since Chevalier was, at the time, the senior most advi-

sor to the French West African colonial administrations responsible for environmental concerns. Subsequently, deductions made from analysis of the botanical composition ('phytosociology') of vegetation forms in these zones by botanists such as Aubreville, Adam and Schnell reinforced the hypothesis that the forest-savanna mosaic was in temporal transition.

Observing the tree species characteristic of forest patch boundaries, for instance, botanists deduced them to indicate savannised forest (Adam 1948, 1968). They did not consider other possibilities: that this 'transition woodland' could represent a stable intermediate form, the establishment of forest in savanna, or the complex outcome of inhabitants' management strategies.

**A**s Aubreville and Adam, in turn, became senior figures in French West Africa's forestry administrations, their phytosociology interpreted within the degradation logic became institutionalised as the principal methodology for assessing regional vegetation change, and their publications became key texts in comprehending West African environmental history more generally (Aubreville 1949). Characteristically, these botanists directly observed landscape features and deduced history and people's impact from them. Their disciplinary position and the social conditions of their fieldwork reinforced their pejorative visions of local farming and fire management practices, rendering it both difficult and seemingly unnecessary to properly verify change with with local people themselves.

It has remained 'scientifically' acceptable to interpret vegetation history and anthropogenic impact from snapshot landscape observations, with deductions from plant and other

indicators, vegetation surveys, and remotely-sensed imagery now adding to the repertoire. For example, modern observers of Kissidougou often consider the presence of oil palms to indicate that forest has retreated from the area, while the team preparing Guinea's forestry action plan (République de Guinée 1988) deduced from their air photographic 'snapshots' and vegetation surveys that southern Kissidougou was a 'post-forest' zone. Similar social distance and pre-conception as characterised the colonial botanists enables today's analysts too, to overlook both local people's environmental experiences and management, and historical methods (eg. oral histories and archive consultation) in comprehending environmental influences and trends.

Historical data sets are nevertheless available today, and their examination produces a very different picture of vegetation change. We compiled a picture of Kissidougou's vegetation dynamics through elderly people's oral recollections concerning vegetation use and management, comparative analysis of 1952, 1982 and 1991 air photographs and 1989/92 SPOT satellite data, and landscape descriptions found in archives dating from 1893. Social anthropological fieldwork in Kissi and Kuranko villages throughout 1992 and 1993 provided an understanding of inhabitants' agro-ecological concepts and techniques and the social conditions of their application in the present, enabling closer enquiry into land use change.

**F**ar from being relics, Kissidougou's forest islands prove to have been created by local populations. In the majority of villages, elders describe how their ancestors encouraged forest patch formation around settlements which had been founded either in savanna or beside gallery forests.

The formation and growth of forest islands around recently established village sites is often visible when 1952 and modern air photographs are compared. Villagers also suggest that woody cover on the upland slopes and plateaux between the forest islands has generally increased during this century, and not declined as has been thought.

In the north and east of the prefecture, grass savannas have become more densely wooded with relatively fire-resistant savanna trees and oil palms. Indeed that oil palms have spread north into savannas, encouraged by villagers, suggests that they may be better seen as outposts of anthropogenic forest advance than as relic indicators of forest retreat. Even more strikingly, in the south and south-east, large expanses of grass and sparse shrub savanna have ceded entirely to forest fallow vegetation: the area is actually a 'post-savanna', not a 'post-forest' zone.

**T**hese southerly savanna-forest transitions are not only evident in air photograph comparison, but are strongly indicated by changes in everyday resource use: for example the introduction of tree felling in agricultural operations, greater availability of preferred fuelwood species, changes in roofing and thatching materials, and changes in termite species associated with particular edible fungi. These demonstrable changes, which reflect long term interactions between the populations of Kissidougou and their forest-savanna vegetation (Fairhead and Leach 1996a), strongly challenge the view of an ongoing southerly shift of vegetation zones, iconography of the ongoing southerly shift of vegetation zones.

Equally, evaluating 'degradation' in terms of a vegetation climax is revealed as inadequate when one

takes the impact of long term climate history into account. Given that West Africa has experienced both long period, deep climatic fluctuations and changes in climatic variability (Brooks 1986), the history of vegetation form begins to appear as a history of continual transition, rather than of divergence from a single, once extant climax. Recent ecological analysis suggests that such ceaseless transitions depend on multifactor complexes rather than trends in one particular variable; if a transition-causing factor reverts to its pretransition level vegetation may move to another state, but need not return to its original one (Behnke and Scoones 1991; Dublin *et al.*, 1990; Sprugel 1991).

The various forest and savanna forms in the transition zone can be seen as such multiple-determined states dependent on fire, soil, water, seed availability, animal-related, and other conditions. Deflection from one state to another may depend upon a particular, possibly even unique historical conjuncture of ecological and management factors. By altering the balance of interacting factors, people can initiate shifts between states which might be unattainable – or much less likely – through ‘natural’ ecological processes alone. The shifts from savanna to forest in Kissidougou could be seen in this way (Fairhead and Leach 1996a).

**Y**et within Guinea, environmental services have been so convinced of the degradation they are combatting as to find it unnecessary to compare their commissioned aerial and satellite images with those from 1952, let alone question their interpretive framework. Even when comparative interpretations are carried out, they are frequently not independent of preconceived ideas of vegetation change. In Kissidougou,

the incredulous reactions of forestry staff when presented with 1952 and 1990 air photographs showing increased woody vegetation led them to a sceptical search for ways to render the comparison invalid (the photographs were taken in atypical years, or incomparable seasons).

In other parts of West Africa, similarly surprising results have simply been disbelieved and dismissed: ‘Apparent increases in biomass from pre-disturbance [vegetation] to present were labelled “discrepancy” and such discrepancies were omitted from further analysis...there seems little possibility that biomass has increased as a result of land use’ (Houghton *et al.* 1993).

**I**n contrast, justifiable scepticism was cast aside when a comparison of eastern Guinea satellite images taken ten years apart seemed to show significant vegetation degradation, and on which basis major donor funds for a regional environmental rehabilitation programme were secured (Grégoire *et al.* 1988).

The images of environmental change derived from these ‘scientific’ analyses have been incorporated not only into Guinean environmental institutions, but also into formal sector education and the popular consciousness of state functionaries. They are regularly reproduced in school geography lessons and national university curricula and theses. For those educated within this vision, casual readings of the landscape come to serve as confirmatory evidence; dry season bush fire is taken as proof of a worsening problem, and the conversion to farmland of a few forest islands near the town for urban market-gardening is taken to suggest forest island diminution everywhere.

Such casual landscape readings are often made during the dry season,

when external consultants, forestry agents and urban nationals’ visits to villages are concentrated. This is the destructive part of villagers’ normal seasonal cycle, when bush is cleared for farming, fires sweep the savanna and trees are cut for construction or sale. Regeneration during the rainy season, anyway more subtle to observe, escapes attention within this seasonal bias (cf. Chambers 1983).

Interpretations of vegetation degradation are reinforced not only by local observation, but also by the global and regional level analyses with which they are in keeping, and which carry the weight of international authority. Given FAO figures concerning rapid forest loss in West Africa (FAO 1990), for example, it appears inconceivable that Kissidougou should be experiencing anything else. Such figures, so frequently publicised in the more glossy development literature and on the radio, are far more accessible to the environmental administrations and urban public concerned with Kissidougou than are analyses of the locality itself.

**E**qually, the rhetoric of shared environmental crisis, made so apparent in the 1992 UNCED conference in Rio, appeals far more powerfully to local officials than the statements of the villagers supposedly experiencing these problems. This was made evident in the 1993 ‘Journées de l’Environnement’ conference designed to raise awareness of Kissidougou prefecture’s environmental problems, where both the Prefect and Kissidougou’s urban based environmental NGO’s framed their speeches in terms of global concern with biodiversity loss and the common West African struggle against desertification.

The projection of global and regional concerns onto Kissidougou’s

environment has recently heightened, but it is not new; it has informed administrative perceptions since the early colonial period. A concern that deforestation in Kissidougou would damage regional climate and hydrology was apparent in the earliest writings of Chevalier (eg. 1909), and underlay a major watershed rehabilitation programme first outlined in the 1930s, funded in the 1950s following the 1948 Goma inter-African soil conference, and launched again in 1991

**T**his analysis of environmental change which informs local policy cannot be separated from the financial context in which environmental institutions operate. In Guinea, early colonial administrations first became concerned with the perceived destructiveness of African environmental management because the colonial economy was heavily dependent on 'threatened' natural resources; initially wild rubber and then, in Kissidougou, oil palm products and tree crops grown in forest patches (Fairhead and Leach 1995).

In the later colonial and post-colonial periods, more regional and global economic imperatives joined these national ones. In the 1950s, new funding envelopes for regional soil, climate and hydrological conservation became available following the heightened Africa-wide environmental concern epitomised by the 1948 Goma conference. More recently, administrative solvency and development activities have come to rely even more heavily on foreign aid, and have thus become subject to various forms of 'green conditionality' (Davies 1992; Davies *et al.* 1991). This greening of aid, and the specific forms it takes, reflects donors' needs to satisfy home political constituencies heavily influenced by media images and northern environmental NGOs, as well as their

own institutional assessments of African environmental problems.

In Guinea, a large proportion of foreign assistance is now allocated, sectorally and by region, directly to environmental rehabilitation. A new generation of heavily funded environmental projects has emerged, including, in Kissidougou, two component projects of the internationally funded Niger river protection programme. In agricultural and other development activities as well, overt environmental sustainability components are important for attracting future funds. Kissidougou's prefecture administration, agriculture and forestry services are well aware of the packages which satisfy the donors in this respect: agroforestry programmes, forest conservation and improvement, bush fire control, and rationalisation and reduction of shifting cultivation in favour of intensive wetland rice.

**D**uring Kissidougou's 'Journées de l'Environnement' the prefecture's no. 2 administrator stated explicitly that: 'Donors are interested principally in environmental projects, so we must solicit their aid to ensure the development of the prefecture'. He suggested that other localities learn from the example of the Niger protection project zones where schools, water and other infrastructural developments were provided in exchange for local participation in environmental protection. The emergence of local, urban based environmental NGOs such as Kissidougou's Friends of Nature Society has also been encouraged by recent donor interest, not only in environmental issues but also in the claimed capacity of NGOs to achieve 'participatory' development. In short, presenting a degrading or threatened environment has become an imperative to gain access to donors' funds. In this respect, our own findings were

often considered subversive: threatening to the prefecture's future financial and development interests, and to the continued employment and material privileges of environmental project administrators and extension workers.

Considering the environment as degrading and threatened is equally crucial to the solvency of state environmental institutions when they do not receive donor support. Since their inception, Francophone West African forestry services have derived revenues from the sale of permits and licences for timber and wildlife exploitation, and fines for what became environmental crimes in breaking state environmental laws. In Guinea, setting bush fires actually carried the death penalty during the 1970s (Law 08/AN/72 of 14 September 1972). Environmental services have been able to gain such revenues only by taking control over the management of natural resources (e.g. fire and trees), and this through deeming villagers to be incapable and destructive resource custodians.

**R**evenues are thus ensured by a reading of the landscape as degraded and degrading; of forest islands as disappearing relics in an increasingly grassy savanna, not as created in an increasingly woody one. The importance to forestry staff of informal receipts gained while applying policies of repression only accentuates the imperative for this environmental reading, while the antagonistic relationship thus engendered between forestry agents and villagers bars communication about villagers' own environmental experiences. Thus at local and national, as well as international levels, the economic structures within which environmental agencies operate frame the ways that information is derived.

The attitudes of forestry staff depend not only on their financial and

educational status as forestry service members, but also on their socio cultural positions. They share with many other formally educated, urban based Guineans a particular vision of villagers' resource management capabilities. This image – of the rural farmer as environmental destroyer, and rural farming and forestry techniques as backward, in need of modernisation – conforms with and helps justify urban intellectuals' self-distinction as modern and progressive. Such distinctions were reinforced under Sekou Touré's 1958-84 regime when the urbanised were politically and economically privileged, and their vision of a highly mechanised, capital intensive technical future dominated rural development approaches (Rivière 1976).

**A**s greater attention has come to be paid to environmental rather than agricultural issues, the environmental component of this degrading view of village capabilities has become dominant. Generalised notions about 'man's destructive impact on the environment', projected locally, have entered the numerous processes through urban educated people who understand themselves as relatively more 'civilised' or 'globalised' (cf. Bledsoe 1990). And just as urban circles benefitted from the agricultural modernisation which wrested resource control from villagers, so they have become the main beneficiaries of environmental control, keeping the moral high ground while gaining from policies such as those removing timber cutting rights from 'irresponsible' villagers.

Images of forest loss in Kissidougou are also reinforced as part of processes of ethnic distinction, which depend on colonial portrayals and their subsequent incorporation into local political discourse. From the earliest, colonial constructions of ethnic difference among Kissidougou's

populations rested partly on stereotypes concerning their environmental behaviour. The Kissi were seen as 'forest people' like other groups further south (Toma, Guerze), with cultural proclivities towards forest conservation. Kissi were seen as more forest loving largely because of the centrality to local life of the 'forêt sacrée' (or 'secret society') initiation ceremonies which they held in their forest islands.

Kissi 'sacred' forests were upheld as veritable islands of nature conservation amid secular destruction around them (Aubreville 1939), just as they are by today's policy makers. This was despite the reality that only part of a forest island would be devoted to the 'sacred' forest institution, medicines and powers, and that the 'sacred' technologies would usually be installed only after the forest island had itself been formed.

**A**s 'forest people', Kissi were contrasted ethnically with the more northerly 'savanna people' of Maninka origin, including Kissidougou's Kuranko populations. In the context of historical and ongoing southwards Maninka migration, their fire-setting in savanna farming, honey collecting, and hunting was considered responsible for southwards savannisation (Adam 1948). Where Kuranko lived within forest islands, this was perceived as learning from the Kissi (Administrateur de Cercle 1913), as it is by modern environmental projects. Yet Kuranko themselves associate prosperity and fortune with inhabiting a forest island (*haraye yetule ro*), and where Maninka immigrants have moved into Kissi villages, they have usually been incorporated into Kissi society and land management. That the majority of supposedly 'forest' Kissi families can trace descent from a Maninka family of savanna origin

clearly undermines such arguments of ethnically driven environmental degradation.

During the First Republic, Sekou Touré's state regime encouraged villages to move out of the 'mystified obscurity' of their forest islands into 'the open', into the 'clarity' and 'modernity' upheld by the regime's cultural demystification policy, and into the roadside world more accessible to its demands (Rivière, 1969). This policy drew on and reinforced ethnic stereotypes, deepening their construction in terms of forest. Maninka self-representations often draw on the ideal of social clarity, of openness and simplicity in language and expression, and draw an explicit contrast between their clear 'savanna language' (*kan gbe*) and the secrecy and obscurity of the forest culture and languages which they find difficult to learn.

Many Kissi perceived Sekou Touré's regime as Maninka-biased, and considered the attempts it made to evict them from their forests and suppress 'sacred forest' schools as attempts to disempower the institution which had hitherto defended the Kissi from Maninka domination, whether cultural or military. The political conditions from 1958-1984 therefore reinforced the significance of forest symbolism in Kissidougou's local and ethnically charged political discourse.

**I**n this context, both the present privileging of the forest, and the view that it is threatened as portrayed by the forestry service, coincide with the broader politico-ethnic interests of urban Kissi; interests heightened in the run-up to multi-party electoral processes beginning in December 1993. Sharing one forest – where the forest islands of neighbouring villages have come to touch each other – is one of the strongest metaphors of Kissi poli-

tical solidarity, linked as it used to be to alliance in warfare and forest initiation. Accepting the idea that the Kissi region could (until even recently) have been united in one forest provides a politically appealing vision of unity, as does blaming Maninka immigration for forest loss. These views are most often voiced within the politically influential urban Kissi community, but can also be heard in villages when rural Kissi use environmental issues to make politico-ethnic points.

Distinctions between urban institutional and rural villagers' perceptions of environmental change also derive from different valuations of vegetation quality. For urban observers and the forestry service, high value is accorded to large forest trees, whether for recent global reasons or for the commercial gains to be made from timber exploitation, which has recently become big business in Kissidougou.

**V**illagers do not share this valuation, not least because the forestry laws designed to regulate timber exploitation (preserve the environment) deny them all but an insignificant royalty from trees cut by outsiders in their forest islands. Their values are conditioned, instead, by the importance of different vegetation types and species in agriculture, gathering, settlement and tree crop protection and cultural practices, and in which lower bush fallow vegetation is frequently more useful than high forest (Leach and Fairhead 1993). The large trees of forest islands are, in fact, more the 'fortuitous' consequence of villagers' environmental management for other reasons than a deliberately encouraged feature. While the felling of these trees may be of little consequence to villagers (or to forest area in the long term), to urban and official observers it epitomises, and

thus reinforces their conviction of, environmental destruction.

**T**he image of environmental degradation in Kissidougou is supported by apparently successful explanations for it in terms of local land use practices and their changing socio-economic, demographic and institutional contexts. Just as the prevalent socio-cultural, institutional and financial structures lead certain readings of and methods for investigating environmental change to dominate, while excluding others from consideration, so these same structures influence the methods and theories brought to bear in understanding why the environment has changed.

Policy makers' thinking has long been dominated by the view that local land use encourages savannisation and reduces savanna tree cover and soil quality. These apparent processes of degradation are readily observable in the short term. In, for example, the clearing and burning of wooded lands for farming, and the setting of fire by hunters and herders. But less attention is paid to processes of regeneration and the impact of local practices on them. In villagers' experience, their land use has, in the long run, maintained or enhanced woody vegetation cover and soil quality. The logic of local cultivation practices which encourage the advance of forest in this region has been documented both by ourselves (Fairhead and Leach 1996b) and in neighbouring Cote d'Ivoire (Blanc-Pamard and Spichiger 1973). Villagers tend to consider themselves as improving once less productive lands, rather than reducing the productivity of once 'naturally' productive ones.

Nevertheless, the contrasting external image of local land use as inevitably degrading is combined with particular theories about the

impact of demographic and social change to account for the long term degradation which policy makers believe to have taken place. Discussions in development circles of the links between population and environment, poverty and environment, and social organisation and environmental management have set terms of debate which guide causal interpretations by development personnel, consultants, and national institutions.

Given that it is explanations of supposed environmental degradation which are being sought, and given the prevailing intellectual, social and fiscal structures which condition causal analysis, all but the dominant strands of thinking within these debates tend to be suppressed at the project level. Thus it is Malthusian views of the relationship between population and environment, the deduction that impoverishment forces villagers to draw down their natural resources, and the notion of a 'tragedy of the commons', which are used to explain increasing environmental degradation in Kissidougou.

**E**nvironmental degradation is attributed to assumed demographic trends by policy makers who believe that, since local land use is degrading, more people must mean more degradation, principally through extra upland use. An image of low pre-colonial population densities is commonly linked to the supposed existence of extensive forest cover then, and rapid population growth during this century (and now refugee settlements) are held to account for forest decline. Short fallows and long cultivation periods on savanna uplands are often taken as evidence of modern population pressure. That local farmers use intensive cultivation practices for positive ecological and economic reasons, unrelated to population pressure,

is not considered. Nor does the possibility that population growth could enable environmental improvement receive attention. Yet in Kissidougou where there are more villages, there are more forest islands, and more people can mean that there is more intensive, soil and vegetation enhancing savanna cultivation and more generalised fire control.

Socio-economic theories to explain supposed recent environmental degradation attribute it partly to modern poverty, forcing villagers to sacrifice sustainable long term resource management in favour of short term uses assumed to be degrading. Recent environmental degradation is also explained through the idea that modern resource use is disorganised and individualistic; a vision shared by many local administrators as much as external consultants and university academics.

In many versions of this narrative, a picture of people in greater 'harmony' with their forested environment is projected onto the pre-colonial period; a harmony maintained either by efficacious traditional authority (Green 1991; Stiegelitz 1990) or, in more sophisticated terms, by the integration of fire control within intra and inter-village social, cultural and political relationships (Zerouki 1993). An armoury of factors is held to have ruptured this controlled harmony, including socio-economic change, the weakening of traditional authority, new economic and cultural aspirations and social divisions, and the alienation of local resource control to state structures.

The logical policy implication is that resource use can be rendered sustainable by improving forms of 'regulation', 'authority' and 'organisation', whether by greater state control (e.g. over timber cutting and fire) or, in

recent policy emphasis, by 'rebuilding' community institutions. These dominant social and demographic explanations for degradation, and the idea of degradation itself, seem to be mutually sustaining. From within this complex the actual history of peoples environmental use and the complex influences on it fail to receive serious attention.

The institutional and financial structures in which social science is applied to environmental problems in Guinea strongly support such uncritical explanations of degradation. Studies are commissioned by donor agencies and projects who need (or at least, must be seen to have sought) socio-economic information to help them tackle the environmental problems integral to their institutional survival in more 'appropriate' and 'participatory' ways. The environmental problem is thus built into the very terms of reference of consultants who have neither the time nor the social position to investigate village natural resource management and its changes on any other terms.

This problem is not necessarily solved when consultants are Guinean, or even working in their own areas; indeed it can be compounded by the urban intellectual images which such local consultants bring to bear. Furthermore, as the dominant social and demographic explanations of environmental degradation are the stuff of academic debate, consultancy reports phrased in their terms gain easy acceptance and credibility.

The interface between environmental-development agencies and villagers, which has developed over more than half a century and often in antagonistic ways, renders the communication of local environmental experiences highly problematic. Villagers, faced by questions about defor-

estation and environmental change, have learned to confirm what they know the questioners expect to hear. This is not only through fear, politeness and the awareness that the truth will be met with incredulity, but also through the desire to maintain good relations with authoritative outsiders who may bring as yet unknown benefits; a school, road or advantageous recognition to the village, for example. In such discussions, the historical ecology that villagers portray is as politically inflected as in their oral histories concerning settlement foundation, where images of initial vacancy (high forest, empty savanna, or abundant wild animals) often justify the firstcomer status of current residents (cf. Dupré 1991; Hill 1984).

Like the prefecture administration, many village authorities realise the benefits which can accompany community participation in environmental rehabilitation, and in this context may publicly agree to the 'urgent need' to plant trees, establish village environmental management committees and so on. Nevertheless, acceptance is not without anxiety: over losing land to 'project' trees; over losing control over management of local ecologies to outsiders ignorant of their specificities; and over the unknown future demands that apparently generous projects of unknown origin and intent, huge financial resources and foreign interests may later exact. Everyday forms of resistance thus frequently underlie overt participation: letting project tree nurseries and plantations burn in the dry season, for example, and ensuring that necessary fires are set in ways contrary to agreed project procedures.

It has been surprising to us how little the personal lifetime experiences of development workers from the prefecture influence the way that Kissi-

dougou's environment has come to be perceived. This may be because personal environmental histories have too limited a spatial coverage to challenge a generality, or because unbroke personal histories are themselves rare: state officials are frequently transferred and are in preference posted to areas with which they are unfamiliar, so they have frequently been away from their childhood village environments for long periods. Such people almost invariably justify their perceptions of historical deforestation with examples drawn from roadsides and urban peripheries, with which they have more continual familiarity but which in Kissidougou are the proverbial exceptions to the rule.

**S**cientific challenge to the dominant analysis in Guinea is also rare. This is partly because the scientific information and ecological theory which questions the derived savanna model, and which often proves to support the farmers' explanations which we have investigated, is dispersed among different disciplines and their specialist academic journals. These are largely inaccessible to policy makers and national academic institutions. Information from each discipline alone (e.g. botany, hydrology, soil science, demography and climate history) is insufficient to shift thinking in a sufficiently fundamental way, lack of inter-disciplinary criticism seems, indeed, to promote consistency

In any case, little such discussion enters the information bulletins of multinational organisations (e.g. FAO), NGOs, development journals and the media; the sources on which most development personnel rely for environmental science information. Fundamentally, the precepts basic to local science which challenge conventional savannisation wisdom are not easily apprehended by researchers

ill-disposed either to listen or to understand.

This environmental case illustrates in a particularly striking way how development problems and policies are constituted within diverse, seemingly disparate relations. The vision of environmental degradation in Kissidougou to which so many people are drawn for different reasons has, for a hundred years now, been sustained within their scientific, social, political, institutional and financial relationships. These relationships have evolved, showing the operation of power in a Foucauldian sense (Foucault 1976).

**T**he intellectual, social, political and financial structures which sustain the vision of environmental degradation in Kissidougou form a constellation in which each element reinforces the others in a sticky web. It is too simple to suggest that mistakes are made in Kissidougou because erroneous information is uncritically inherited, although this has sometimes been the case. It is more that the same basic analysis is perpetually reconstituted over and over again within prevailing institutional, financial and explanatory climates. Nor is it necessarily the case that particular people or institutions are pursuing conscious and direct personal interests in using information for political or economic ends; rather, all are subject to and are the vehicles of the same conjuncture of intellectual, institutional and economic structures.

The degradation vision has evolved over time and in ways which mean that today it cannot be attributed only to donor agencies and their narratives. It is partly the product of a long history of interaction with and incorporation into local social and political processes, and is thus today partly sustained by them. This is not to say that

villagers' everyday ecological practice is influenced by the deforestation reasoning, but merely that their ecological reasoning is subjugated in much political interaction.

Views of degradation in Kissidougou are not sustained on the basis of ignorance, but through the continual production of supportive knowledge. 'What has taken place . . . is the production of effective instruments for the formation and accumulation of knowledge—methods of observation, techniques of registration, procedures for investigation and research, apparatuses of control. All this means that power, when it is exercised through these subtle mechanisms, cannot but evolve, organise and put into circulation a knowledge, or rather apparatuses of knowledge' (Foucault 1976: 102).

Those who are convinced of degradation do not lack data to support their convictions, and it is within this methodologically supported certainty that alternative methods and data sets have been disqualified as inadequate, naive, or unscientific.

**T**he disjuncture between locally lived reality and the degradation discourse therefore has to be considered as a political as much as a methodological one. Local environmental experience and history are, as we have seen, not easily accessible across farmers' interface with environmental agencies and urban intellectuals. Recent attempts to overcome problems of information transfer at the interface through taking a more participatory approach to research and development (eg. PRA)—as current in Kissidougou as elsewhere—are not the unproblematic answer they may first appear, without serious attention to altering the intellectual, institutional and financial structures which are implicated in the production of knowledge and of confidence in it.



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# The Amazon: a natural landscape?

HUGH RAFFLES

AMAZONIA has a special place in the popular imagination. Since the early days of European exploration, reports have circulated throughout the world of its astonishing and overwhelming nature. Above all else, more even than the tales of headhunting natives and fearless women warriors, it has been the unrelenting vastness and the brute physicality of tropical Amazonian nature that has impressed the traveler. Visitors as diverse as Lope de Aguirre, Sir Walter Raleigh, Alexander von Humboldt, and Teddy Roosevelt have responded with the ambivalent superlatives that betray both intimidation and wonderment (Raffles, in press).

In recent decades, this powerful ability of the region to signify nature at its most primal has facilitated the adoption of Amazonia by the conservation movement, and its ascension to its current status as the key symbol of threatened biodiversity and fragile ecosystems. Driving much of this modern rhetoric is an assumption of the pristineness of the region's nature, and a narrative of an unsullied Eden

corrupted by the taint of civilization (Slater 1996). In these accounts, there are two radically opposed roles available to local people: they are either the guardians of the forest or its destroyers. They either protect and nurture the region's wonders, or they desecrate its treasures. Increasingly, however, it is becoming clear that people have long interacted with this area in other, more complex ways, and that they have dramatically influenced and managed a landscape that outsiders stubbornly persist in calling a wilderness.

One morning in 1961, a group of villagers from the small community I call Igarapé Guariba set off from their houses with machetes and hoes, rounding up a not always obliging herd of water-buffalo on the way. They were working to cut a canal about two miles long, the first of many leading across fields thick with tall papyrus grass and into dense tropical rain forest. Today that narrow canal and the stream that flowed into it have formed a full-fledged river more than six hundred yards wide at its mouth, and the landscape in this part of the northern Brazilian state of Amapá has been dramatically transformed.<sup>1</sup>

\* An earlier version of this article appeared in *Natural History*. We thank the American Museum of Natural History for permission to use a modified version of that piece

<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed account of these events, see Raffles 1999

Igarapé Guariba is on the northern channel of the Amazon estuary, a vast island-filled delta with mouths that stretch nearly three hundred miles from coast to coast. The village is a hundred miles inland from the ocean, and here the waters can rise more than twelve feet with the twice-daily tides, leaving sheer banks and thigh-deep mud in its wake. In winter, when the heavy rains swell the rivers all the way to Peru, the tidal variation is at its greatest and the estuary changes in another way, filling with large floating islands of grass that have descended with small animals and clouds of insects from who-knows-where, possibly hundreds of miles upstream.

**W**hen the four founding families of Igarapé Guariba arrived in the late 1950s, the river from which the community takes its name was, as one long-time resident put it, a '*besteira*' (a silly little thing). Wadeable by children at low tide, more a stream than a river, it ran for only a mile, narrowing from about a hundred yards at its junction with the Amazon to less than fifteen at its terminus in a shallow waterfall. Soon after the arrival of these founders, Manoel Viegas, the landowner in the area, built a sawmill in Igarapé Guariba and contracted workers in the town of Macapá to come out and work for him. The original families were sent into the forest to collect timber for sale at the mill. The wood they brought out was recorded in personal notebooks and exchanged for merchandise in the white-painted company store that sat on a low bluff at the mouth of the river.

It wasn't long before the valuable trees in the immediate area had been cut and sold. Viegas began to look to the distant forest, extending mile after mile beyond the grassy fields behind the waterfall. The timber was there but it was all but inaccessible. To

reach it collectors had to push and drag their canoes for hour after hour opening tall papyrus grass that closed behind them as they went forward. But Viegas wasn't the only one with his eye on that forest: the collectors he employed looked too and saw good quality land with abundant fish, game, and forest fruits. What followed was a collaboration of sorts which ended, after Viegas's death 13 years ago, with the community gaining access to a large area of Amazonian rain forest and the landscape changing almost beyond recognition.

When Waldir Gomes da Souza took me on a tour of Igarapé Guariba, where he has lived since he arrived as a child in the late 1950s, he had difficulty convincing me that the complex network of streams, rivers, and lakes in the area was less than 35 years old. 'No, you couldn't even get a canoe through here', he shouted above the noise of the outboard motor as we bounced over the choppy surface of a lake more than a mile and a half mile wide. 'Before we opened this up, we'd go hunting in the forest back there,' pointing into the distance, 'and we'd have to salt the meat and bring it home on our backs...the sweat, and the salt, and the heat of the sun, walking all day long...really, it was terrible!'

**I**t was a dizzying story. Every time we passed a stream winding its way into the forest I would ask the same question: 'Is that one natural?' And nearly every time, the same answer: 'We opened that one. Me, and my brothers, my father, João Grande, Luiz...', many still living in Igarapé Guariba, others dead, others who had moved away. 'We cut and uprooted the plants, we dug out a pathway, then we drove the buffalo through; the tides did the rest.' And he described the dangers they had faced from crocodiles, snakes, *candiru* – the 'ornifice fish,' –

sting rays, and jaguars, the clouds of mosquitoes and tiny blackfly, and the timber, seeds, fruit, and animals they had brought out of the forest to eat and sell.

**T**here are 25 families now living on the Rio Guariba, a tributary near the mouth of the Amazon, northeast of Macapá. This river doesn't appear on any except the most recent maps of the area for the simple reason that it wasn't there 25 years ago – at least, not in any significant form. Streams shift their beds, lakes form, islands disappear or migrate, and the Amazon river system undergoes both daily and seasonal change and renewal. With such violent natural processes dominating our perception of the region, is it surprising that only recently have researchers begun recognizing the ways local people have harnessed this power to their own ends?

Yet in Igarapé Guariba, these interventions have had a major impact on the local ecosystem. A large area of seasonally flooded grassland is now a permanent lake; forest, houses, and gardens at the river margins fall as the main stream continues to expand; low-lying fields have become subject to periodic inundation, forcing variation in the repertoire of appropriate crops. The fluvial vegetation has changed too, as plants, like the aggressive *aturia*, that are well-adapted to water-borne dispersal and seem to have a greater capacity to prevent erosion, outcompete established grasses and sedges. As its architects intended, the altered landscape has enabled increased human activity. People in Igarapé Guariba now fish and hunt over a much larger area than was previously possible. Local stocks of certain animals – such as the howler monkey, *paca*, and river turtle – are said to have been drastically reduced, whereas populations of others, shrimp

and *capybara* for instance, are thought to have grown.

**W**ith a greater human presence on previously remote land, the species composition of large areas of the forest has changed: new tracts of *miriti* palm and bamboo dominate areas disturbed by timber extraction, and the distinctive *pau mulato* tree sprouts from abandoned fields. Responding to careful management, densities of the graceful *açaí* palm increase, producing more of the nutritious berry-like fruit that eastern Amazonians eat daily as a purple liquid thickened with roasted manioc flour. Ranchers in the area have responded to the new environment by reducing their cattle herds and bringing in more buffalo – powerful swimmers but also greedy eaters that consume twice as much vegetation as their bovine relatives. Land in Igarapé Guariba is abundant at present, but, with growing families and unstable ecological conditions, people are thinking of their future. As in many other communities in the region, the residents of Igarapé Guariba are developing long term plans to manage their forest and fluvial resources.

Igarapé Guariba is one place in Amazonia where people have intervened in nature to change rivers and streams with dramatic results. There are, as I suggested in the opening paragraph, many more throughout the region. The famous British naturalists Henry Walter Bates and Alfred Russel Wallace sailed through a canal close to the town of Igarapé-Miri in 1848. Archival materials tell us that it had been dug out by slaves, many of whom died when the dam protecting them from the waters of the Rio Mojú suddenly collapsed (Bates 1863: 58, Lobato 1985). Indeed, once we are sensitized to human intervention in the fluvial landscape and begin looking for signs of the management of

streams, canals, and rivers, there is an abundance of documentary and anecdotal evidence. Occasionally, it is cartographic, as in the 1808 map of Amapá on which a river is marked *Obstruido*, with the explanatory note: 'Furo Araguaí blocked off on the orders of Conde de V. Flor.'

Now and again – rarely – we might stumble on an ethnographic description as in Erland Nordenskiöld's eyewitness accounts of 1916 of canals and moats on the llanos de Mojos in Bolivia (reported in Métraux 1948; also see Denevan 1970, Macedo and Anderson 1993, Winkler Prins 1997). Sometimes it is in a chance conversation, as with the elderly bar owner in the village of Santo Antonio de Pedreira who invited me in for lunch and started talking about the improvements he planned for his land, improvements that included a fish trap 15 yards wide and a 150 yards long, dug out mechanically in an extended 'L' parallel to the river, where he will raise fish and river-turtles.

**A**nd sometimes it might pop up in a conversation on an entirely different topic. Discussing buffalo with a friend whose father owned a ranch on Ilha Caviana near Macapá, I found out that he had worked off and on for six months in 1992 with his brothers and a group of hired workers to dig a mile long channel to drain winter pasture: 'It rots the buffaloes' hooves to stand too long in water', he explained.

Researchers are today finding more and more evidence that what is still often described as the largest area of 'wilderness' on the planet, is in fact a constantly changing landscape, profoundly influenced by human management.<sup>2</sup> I have focused here on interventions in the river system, but

2. For a parallel argument made in relation to the United States, see Cronon 1996

much of the most exciting work in recent years has looked at the ways local residents have influenced terrestrial environments: changing soil properties, altering the species composition and density of forest and savanna, managing varied landscapes in transformative ways (see Posey 1985, Balée 1989, 1993, Hecht and Posey 1990, Padoch and Pinedo-Vásquez 1999)

**T**he importance of such research is quite clear: it provides a powerful corrective to long-standing popular and academic understandings of Amazonia as a place in which local populations are hostage to the all-powerful forces of nature. Whether this nature has been figured in positive or negative terms, it has nearly always been transcendent, and Amazonia consistently portrayed first and foremost as an environment, not a society. Instead, recent studies understand the Amazonian landscape as biocultural, rather than simply natural, and explain the historical invisibility of local interventions by reference to the continual reproduction of Euro-American mythologies. In this way, they help reinstate some creative agency in the hands and minds of Amazonian people, and open up the possibility of non-coercive conservation and development strategies driven by local expertise and experience.

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# India's groundwater challenge

MARCUS MOENCH

GROUNDWATER is a dry topic unless you happen to have a dry well. That said, groundwater management involves some of the most complex and socially challenging sets of issues facing India in the 21st century. Furthermore, how those issues are resolved will affect both the environment and the day to day life of most people living in rural and urban areas.

Groundwater is an invisible resource. As a result, both the dynamics of the resource base and the services it produces are often poorly understood. This article focuses first on the broad array of environmental and social services that depend on groundwater. Key aspects of the resource base and emerging problems are presented next. The final section outlines some of the social, ethical and

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on three primary sources (listed below) and draws material from them. References for specific information and figures in the article can be found in the three primary sources:

Marcus Moench (1996), *Groundwater Policy: Issues and Alternatives in India*, International Irrigation Management Institute, IIMI Country Paper, India, No. 2, Colombo, pp. 61.

World Bank (1998), *India: Water Resources Management Sector Review, Groundwater Regulation and Management Report*, Washington D.C., pp. 98.

ISCT & UNDESA (1999), *Groundwater and Society: Resources, Tensions & Opportunities*, Themes in Groundwater Management for the 21st Century, in press.

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institutional challenges inherent in sustainable management.

**O**ver the past 50 years, expansion of groundwater irrigation has played a lead role in food security. Yields in areas irrigated by groundwater are often substantially higher than yields in areas irrigated from surface sources. In India, for example, research indicates that yields in groundwater irrigated areas are higher by one third to one half than in areas irrigated from surface sources and as much as 70-80% of India's agricultural output may be groundwater dependent.

Higher yields from groundwater irrigated areas are due, in large part, to its ease of control and reliability. Early studies indicated that water control alone can reduce the gap between potential and actual yields by about 20%. This translates into substantial benefits. Reliability is even more important. Groundwater is a key buffer against drought and normal variations in rainfall. Overall, increased yields from groundwater irrigated areas have translated into substantially higher yields and are thus a major factor in food production at the regional and national levels.

Furthermore, some of the most important food security benefits related to groundwater lie at the level of individual farmers. The vulnerability to natural hazards of different groups in society, including those that threaten food security, can be explained by their access to networks of key productive and social resources. For rural populations, groundwater is among the most important of these resources.

Households with access to key resources are able to build support systems that reduce their vulnerability to natural hazards. Groundwater irrigation reduces the risk that investment in labour, seed, fertilisers, pesticides

and other inputs will be lost due to drought or the variability of precipitation in normal years while higher yields enable households to generate surpluses. As a result, households with access to groundwater tend to have higher levels of savings and are able to make investments in other productive resources or activities.<sup>1</sup>

When drought strikes or there is a gap in rainfall these households have a dual advantage. First, they are far less likely to suffer losses than those without access to groundwater. Second, even if 'the well runs dry', households that own wells have often been able to save cash or food and invest in alternative sources of income. As a result, they have assets that can carry them through periods of scarcity or crisis.

**G**roundwater is a highly important source of domestic water supply. In India, roughly 80% of rural water supply for domestic uses is met from groundwater. The importance of potable drinking water is clear. As in the case of other uses, however, this is only a portion of the value of groundwater as a source of domestic supply. Wells in villages and towns free people, particularly women, from long daily walks to fetch water from springs or rivers for livestock and domestic uses. This frees time and labour for other activities. Furthermore, since water no longer has to be carried over long distances, more is often used. This can have major health benefits. In addition, because of the filtering nature of the soil and frequent long residence time underground, groundwater is commonly much cleaner than surface sources.

1. The reverse is equally true, e.g. households with better access to social and economic resources are generally better able to afford the cost of obtaining groundwater access. Wells can be expensive.

Groundwater is a key resource for poverty alleviation and economic development. Evidence indicates that improved water sources generate many positive externalities in the overall household micro-economy. In areas dependent on irrigated agriculture, the reliability of groundwater sources and the high crop yields generally achieved as a result often enable farmers with small landholdings to increase income. In India small and marginal farmers (those having less than 2 hectares) own 29% of the agricultural area. Their share in net area irrigated by wells is, however, 38.1 % and they account for 35.3 % of the tubewells fitted with electric pump sets.

Thus, in relation to operational area, small and marginal farmers tend to have proportionally more irrigated land than larger farmers. With productivity on irrigated lands being much higher than that on non-irrigated tracts, better access to irrigation for small and marginal farmers can significantly reduce poverty.

**T**he positive economic impact of groundwater development extends beyond well owners. Access to groundwater stabilises the demand for associated inputs, and leads to the spread of support services for pumps and wells, creating a base for small scale rural industries. Furthermore, the spread of groundwater irrigation can increase demand for labour. In India, for example, labour accounts for approximately 44 % of the cost of installing a well and the additional indirect employment created on every hectare of irrigated land through increased agricultural activity is approximately 45 days per hectare. Therefore, the expansion of groundwater irrigation has significant ripple effects, creating employment throughout rural economies.

The equity impacts of groundwater development for irrigation are, however, not all positive. Modern tubewell and drilling technology tends to be capital intensive. As a result, early exploiters of groundwater have typically been large farmers who produce surpluses for the market. Small holders growing subsistence crops often depend on supplementary groundwater irrigation using a variety of man and animal-driven water lifting devices from shallow, open wells. The expansion of energised pumping technologies tends to draw water levels down, driving shallow wells and muscle-driven devices out of business. This was, for instance, the case throughout the Gangetic basin and other parts of India during the 1960s.

**A**s water levels began to decline, some state governments in India attempted to implement administrative regulations, such as selective credit controls, restrictions on electricity connections and siting and licensing rules. These regulations did not affect landowners who were able to install tubewells early, but limited the entry of latecomers – particularly the resource poor who depended on credit or access to subsidised electricity in order to afford the capital cost of operating and installing pumps. In addition, the economically and politically powerful were generally able to bypass regulations via ‘adjustments’ with officials or by depending on their own financial resources for well construction and operation.

Equity considerations are generally a major point of tension as management needs emerge. Rapid unrestricted development of groundwater has reduced poverty by giving the poor access to a key resource for production. This same pattern of unrestricted development, however, is the primary cause of over-extraction and

quality problems now emerging in many parts of the world. As groundwater problems grow, marginal populations are often the first affected. Water level declines, for example, have the largest economic impact on individuals who are unable to afford deeper wells – i.e. the poor.

The poor are also the least well positioned to protect their interests if groundwater extraction must be reduced. Restrictions on new wells tend to affect them much more than wealthy communities where wells were installed much earlier. Wealthy individuals and communities are also often able to work around these and other types of management restrictions while poorer communities (who generally lack political as well as economic leverage) have less ability to do so. In sum, there is an inherent tension between equitable access to groundwater for all sections of society and sustainable management of the resource base.

**T**he array of environmental services or values dependent on groundwater are often poorly understood. Environmental concerns related to groundwater generally focus on the impacts of pollution and quality degradation on human uses, particularly domestic supply. Development impacts on the groundwater environment are, however, different from the numerous environmental services provided by groundwater resources in their natural state.

What are some of the most important environmental services provided by groundwater? The following list, while not exhaustive, illustrates the degree to which many environmental values are dependent on groundwater:

- \* *Catchment baseflow* derived from groundwater discharge is perhaps the most evident environmental value

associated with groundwater. In many areas springs and the dry season flow in rivers depend heavily on groundwater.

- \* *Instream fisheries and aquatic ecosystems*: Instream flows are critical for the maintenance of fisheries and aquatic ecosystems. As previously noted, groundwater contributions can be a dominant source of water for instream flows, particularly during droughts and dry seasons.

- \* *Inland wetlands*: Wetlands are some of the most productive and biologically diverse inland ecosystems. In many, if not most, cases water availability in wetlands depends on high groundwater levels.

- \* *Surface vegetation*: Groundwater levels directly influence many vegetation communities. Phreatophytes, plants that derive a major portion of their water needs from saturated soils, can be the dominant vegetative species in ecosystems where groundwater levels are shallow. They often form critical wildlife habitat and may serve as important sources of food, fuel and timber.

In many areas the environmental values dependent on groundwater conditions are closely intertwined with a broad array of human use patterns. Groundwater is an integral part of linked hydrologic, ecologic and human use systems. Changes in surface water use, groundwater use or vegetation can send ripple effects throughout these interlinked systems – often with effects that are difficult to predict.

**T**hroughout much of South Asia, groundwater development has proceeded at an exponential pace over the past four decades. In India, the number of shallow tubewells doubled roughly every 3.7 years between 1951 and 1991. Rapid development has engendered its own set of issues. In many

arid and hard rock zones, overdraft and associated quality problems are increasingly emerging. Although the area currently affected by groundwater overdraft may be limited, blocks classified as dark or critical increased at a continuous rate of 5.5% over the period 1984-85 to 1992-93. If continued at this rate, the number would double every 12.5 years. This implies that by the year 2017-18 (25 years from 1992-93), roughly 1532 blocks or 36% of the 4248 blocks in the listed states would be dark or critical.

**O**verdraft is, however, only a fraction of the management challenge associated with groundwater. Large areas, particularly in the command of surface irrigation systems suffer from waterlogging and associated salinity or alkalinity problems. Furthermore, development impacts on the environment and non-agricultural users can be major even where overdraft or waterlogging are absent. Seasonal watertable fluctuations can affect shallow wells, low season flows in surface streams, and pollution loads. The impact of this on drinking water availability, the poor and the environment can be major.

Furthermore, it is important to recognize that *overdraft and water level declines typically affect the sustainability of uses that are dependent on groundwater long before the resource base itself is threatened with physical exhaustion*. Many uses and environmental values *depend on the depth to water* – not the volume theoretically available. In the case of the Ganges basin, for example, water level declines would exclude the poor from access to groundwater (due to the cost of increasing well depth) and would reduce base flows in streams long before the aquifer would face any threat of depletion. The Ganges basin contains, in some locations, over 20

thousand feet of saturated sediment. Dewatering of only the top few tens of feet would, however, have tremendous economic and environmental impacts.

**B**eyond overdraft and water level declines lie the questions of water quality and pollution. Pollution or quality declines can cause reductions in water availability that are far less reversible than overdraft. Non-point source pollution from agriculture and other sources combined with point source pollution represents a major management challenge. Furthermore, not all quality problems are human induced. Probably the most extensive case of arsenic poisoning from groundwater is that of Bangladesh and West Bengal. Arsenic occurs naturally in the groundwaters abstracted from the alluvial deltaic sediments of the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna river systems and an area around 75,000 km<sup>2</sup> is thought to be affected by groundwater with high arsenic concentrations.

Despite the widespread nature of emerging problems, how extensive groundwater mining and pollution problems really are remains uncertain. Official statistics on the number of blocks where extraction is approaching or exceeds recharge may be misleading since great uncertainty exists over the reliability of published extraction and recharge estimates. Furthermore, even the basic water table measurements on which these estimates rest may, in some cases, be open to question.

Uncertainty is also inherent in relation to the extent of pollution. Clearly pollution loads have increased substantially over recent decades with increases in the use of agricultural chemicals, industrial discharges and urban waste. At the same time, no comprehensive data sets are available

that would allow identification of the extent and distribution of different pollutants. Quality problems are also often identified 'after the fact'. Again the arsenic case is illustrative. This was only recognized as a widespread problem when large scale cases of arsenic poisoning began to appear.

A critical challenge in interpreting both quantity and quality problems relates to understanding of the resource base and its dynamics. Many individuals, groundwater professionals included, conceptualize groundwater as flowing smoothly through the earth with rapid recharge from rainfall and relatively uniform water quality. In reality, however, complex rock formations and differential recharge rates result in far more complicated dynamics. These, in turn, greatly complicate understanding of resource conditions.

Two examples are illustrative. In Rajasthan, local communities often suggest that groundwater overdraft problems are alleviated whenever rainfall is above normal. In many cases, however, the water they pump has been underground for hundreds and, in some cases, as much as 20,000 years. Recharge dynamics depend on the permeability of soils and flow patterns are often only weakly related to short term fluctuations in precipitation.

**S**imilarly, major quality problems can depend heavily on very localized conditions. Arsenic, for example, is preferentially mobilized under reducing conditions. As a result, the amount of arsenic encountered in water from a given well can depend on the amount of organic matter available precisely where the well was drilled. A well that happens to pass near a tree trunk buried deep underground may have substantially more arsenic than a well drilled only a short distance away



Debates over the need for management are often clouded by uncertainty over the extent and nature of emerging problems. At the same time, delays in initiating management can have irreversible implications. Once polluted, groundwater aquifers are often impossible to remediate. Pollutants can become attached to the aquifer matrix (the sand, soil and rocks) and serve as a continuous source of contamination. Overdraft can lead to aquifer compaction (reduction of pore spaces) making recharge impossible. Even if recharge is technically feasible and sufficient water is available, the low flow rates characteristic of many fine grained aquifers can make the process so slow that little can be done on a human time scale.

As a result, overdraft is often equivalent to mining a resource such as oil that can not be replenished. Even experts often have difficulty identifying the emergence of irreversible problems until after the fact. Managing uncertainty is thus a major part of any groundwater management equation.

**G**roundwater is an invisible, poorly understood resource, yet one that is critical to a wide variety of social, economic and environmental services. Pollution and declining water levels represent direct threats to the sustainability of environmental, domestic, agricultural and industrial uses dependent on groundwater. In addition, as demands grow and the limits of sustainable extraction become evident, competition between agricultural and other users is increasing rapidly. This can generate competitive extraction between individuals. Each person extracts as much groundwater as possible in order to capture benefits for themselves before the resource is exhausted. The net

result can be a spiral of growing demands and decreasing availability. Competition is, thus, a critical social issue that must be addressed in order to manage groundwater on a sustainable basis.

**T**echnical options for resolving competition over groundwater are generally limited. In most cases communities and groups affected by groundwater overdraft advocate aquifer recharge. Throughout India the real viability of this option is often limited. In much of Gujarat, for example, estimates indicate that increases in recharge could only reduce overdraft by 10% and in many other areas little unutilized surface water is available that could be recharged. Even where water is available, the timing and distribution of rainfall limit the ability to recharge aquifers. Recharge is a slow process limited by the infiltration rates of water through soil and underlying formations. Precipitation, in contrast, is often highly seasonal and occurs in brief bursts little of which can be stored for recharge.

Beyond the technical limitations in recharging aquifers, three concepts are central to understanding the social challenges inherent in resolving competition over groundwater resources. These are:

\* *Interdependency*: Groundwater is a lynchpin that links and creates points of interdependency between agricultural, environmental and economic systems. Environmental values, access for the poor to water, food security during drought years and the economic viability of different crops may, for example, all depend on the maintenance of specific water table or water quality conditions. These conditions are, in turn, often dependent on water use patterns. Recharge from 'inefficient' surface irrigation systems, for example, often helps to

maintain high groundwater levels and, through that, base flows in rivers, groundwater access for the poor and so on.

\* *The public good nature of many groundwater services*: Individual users can only capture the 'extractive' values associated with groundwater, i.e. products produced by pumping and using it in a specific application. This extractive value does not, however, reflect the environmental, drought buffer and other services produced by groundwater when it is left in the aquifer. These services are *public goods* – while individuals may benefit from them, the conditions depend on the cumulative actions of all users. There are strong economic incentives for individuals to overpump groundwater or ignore their contribution to pollution of an aquifer. This leads to chronic undervaluation of groundwater when it is sold in water markets or analyzed using standard economic approaches.

\* *Scale*: In most cases, groundwater cannot be managed at a very local scale. Aquifers generally extend under regions encompassing anywhere from tens to thousands of villages. As a result, aquifer dynamics limit the impact individuals or villages can have on groundwater conditions. At the same time, approaches to management implemented through state agencies are often difficult to adapt in ways that reflect local or regional variations in groundwater conditions and use.

**I**n some parts of the world, notably the United States, the approach to groundwater management hinge on a combination of private rights and regulatory mechanisms. This type of approach attempts to resolve competition by providing a measure of security for all users by specifying individual use rights and using regu-

lation to address public good aspects. In some cases groundwater rights are established that specify the volume individuals are allowed to pump, the types of uses permitted and whether or not the water can be sold to other users. Water markets are widely advocated as a mechanism for ensuring water is allocated to the highest value uses wherever transferable water rights have been established.

**A**pproaches based on regulation and the establishment of individual water rights and water markets face tremendous challenges in India. On a purely practical level, how groundwater rights could be established, monitored and enforced given the millions of wells and conditions in rural India, is far from clear. Regulation would also be difficult and probably highly inequitable in practice. A model bill for groundwater regulation was initially circulated by the Central Ground Water Board in the early 1970s. It proposes a highly centralized system of regulation by state agencies. Modified versions of this have now been adopted in a few locations in India but little implementation has actually occurred.

Beyond the practical limitations of approaches based on individual rights and regulation by the state, however, it is important to recognize the inherently incomplete nature of approaches based on rights, regulation and water markets. It is difficult to define water rights (whether allocated to individuals or communities) in ways that capture the interdependent and public good nature of the services produced by groundwater. When rights are transferable through market mechanisms, the values reflected in the market still tend to be the direct use values rather than the public goods. When attempts are made to regulate groundwater use and transfers in ways

that protect public goods approaches rapidly become complex and inflexible—unable to respond to the diverse conditions encountered at local levels or to the dynamic nature of conditions.

Because of the above limitations, approaches to groundwater management need to reflect the political nature of such decision making in order to be effective. The public good nature of groundwater services and interlinked and often poorly understood character of systems dependent on groundwater tends to generate substantial debate over management approaches and objectives. How this competition is resolved generally depends on the ability of different groups to first understand the nature of emerging problems and management options and second to insert their views into the decision making process that determines management actions.

**A**ccess to information, economic power and the ability to organize greatly influence the ability of different groups to effectively engage in this type of dialogue. Under current conditions, groundwater management decisions are effectively based on economic power—the ability of individuals to afford the costs of deepening their own wells and keep on pumping. Resolving this probably requires approaches based on balance of power concepts and explicit recognition of the political nature of management needs.

Key points of leverage that may encourage the development of effective groundwater management systems could include: (i) improved access to information; (ii) legal standing for groups and individuals to force protection of public interest values; and (iii) the creation of management organizations capable of functioning at an intermediate scale (i.e. between the village and the state)

# Global warming and India

ANAND PATWARDHAN

GLOBAL warming has emerged as one of the most important environmental issues ever to confront humanity. This concern arises from the fact that our everyday activities may be leading to changes in the earth's atmosphere that have the potential to significantly alter the planet's heat and radiation balance. It could lead to a warmer climate in the next century and thereafter, portending a potpourri of possible effects – mostly adverse.

International efforts to address this problem have been ongoing for the last decade, with the Earth Summit at Rio in 1992 as an important launching point, and the Conference of Parties in Buenos Aires in 1998 as the most recent step. Although India as a developing country does not have any commitments or responsibilities at present for reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases such as CO<sub>2</sub> that lead to global warming, pressure is

increasing on India and other large, rapidly developing countries such as China and Brazil to adopt a more proactive role.

At the same time, the developed countries of the North are trying to limit the extent of their commitments for emission reduction. In this situation, the public and policy makers need to be aware of the ramifications and implications of the global warming problem, even if it is a problem that may manifest itself only sometime in the next century.

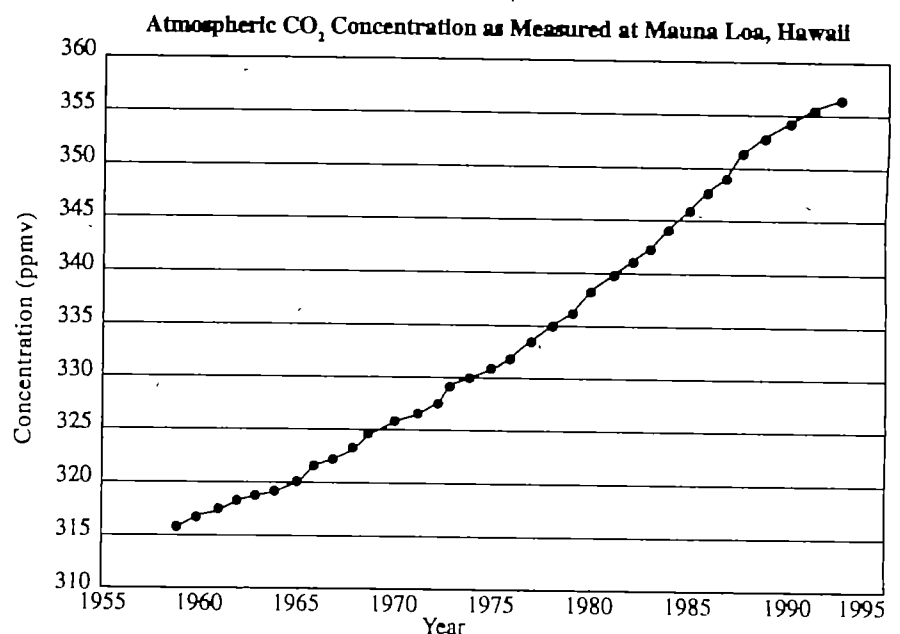
What is climate change? Climate change is a newcomer to the international political and environmental agenda, having emerged as a major policy issue only in the late 1980s and thereafter. But scientists have been working on the subject for decades. They have known since the 19th century that carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) in the atmosphere is a 'green-

house gas', that is, its presence in the atmosphere helps to retain the incoming heat energy from the sun, thereby increasing the earth's surface temperature. Of course,  $\text{CO}_2$  is only one of several such greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Others include methane, nitrous oxide and water vapour. However,  $\text{CO}_2$  is the most important greenhouse gas that is being affected by human activities.

$\text{CO}_2$  is generated by a multitude of processes ranging from animal and plant respiration to the burning of any kind of fuel containing carbon, including coal, oil, wood and cow dung. For a long time, human activities that generated  $\text{CO}_2$  caused only a small perturbation in the natural cycle of the gas. However, since the Industrial Revolution when our usage of fossil fuels increased dramatically, the contribution of  $\text{CO}_2$  from human activities has grown large enough to constitute a significant perturbation of the natural carbon cycle.<sup>1</sup> Since the early '50s, as regular measurements of the atmospheric concentrations of  $\text{CO}_2$  were started, it has been conclusively established that these concentrations are increasing rapidly, driven by human activities.

The concentration of  $\text{CO}_2$  in the earth's atmosphere was about 280 parts per million by volume (ppmv) in 1750, before the Industrial Revolution began. By 1994 it was 358 ppmv and rising by about 1.5 ppmv per year. If emissions continue at the 1994 rate, the concentration will be around 500 ppmv, nearly double the pre-industrial level, by the end of the 21st century.

The concentrations of other greenhouse gases such as methane and nitrous oxide have also been rising at a fairly rapid rate. The effect is that the



atmosphere retains more of the sun's heat, warming the earth's surface. Of course, not all man-made additions to the atmosphere increase warming. For example, aerosols, tiny particles of solid or liquid suspended in the air, which result from the emissions of soot and sulphur dioxide from power plants tend to reflect heat and diminish warming. But aerosols are mostly short-lived while the  $\text{CO}_2$  released into the atmosphere will stay there for decades.

At the same time, concern about local air quality is driving many countries to impose stringent controls on emissions of substances such as sulphur dioxide. As a result, many scientists feel that even as these emissions decrease in the future, the full effect of the greenhouse gases will be unmasked, leading to an even more rapid warming pattern.

While the pattern of future warming is open to debate, it is indisputable that the surface of the earth has warmed, on average, 0.3 to 0.6 degrees celsius since the late 19th century when reliable temperature

measurements began. Recent decades appear to be the warmest since at least 1400, according to the fragmentary information available.

It is against this backdrop of knowledge that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concluded in its second assessment report in 1995 that the current state of knowledge '*now points towards a discernible human influence on global climate.*' In this assessment report, the IPCC also concluded that under the existing scenarios of economic growth and development leading to greenhouse gas emissions, on a world-wide average, temperatures would rise by 1 to 3.5 degrees celsius by the year 2100, and global mean sea level by about 15 to 95 centimeters. It is likely that changes of this magnitude and rapidity could pose severe problems for many natural and managed ecosystems, as well as important economic sectors such as agriculture and water resources. Indeed, for many low-lying and deltaic areas and small islands, a sea level rise of one meter could threaten complete loss of land and extinction of habitation.

Scenarios of future climate change are usually developed using complex 3-dimensional models of the

around 24 billion tons. Though the natural cycles are finely balanced, this is still a significant perturbation as it leads to an accumulation of  $\text{CO}_2$  in the atmosphere

1. For example, over 700 billion tons of  $\text{CO}_2$  cycle annually through the biosphere. The anthropogenic contribution in this cycle is

earth's atmosphere and oceans. However, while we have some degree of confidence in the gross or aggregate estimates for climate parameters (such as globally averaged surface temperature) from these models, there is a great deal of uncertainty with regard to regional details. In addition, most of the ill effects of climate change are linked to extreme weather events, such as hot or cold spells of temperature, or wet or dry spells of rainfall, or cyclones and floods. Predictions of the nature and distribution of such events in a changed climate are even more uncertain, to the extent that virtually no authoritative predictions exist at all. Despite these uncertainties, it is clear that even the *possibility* of changes in such extreme events is quite alarming.

**G**lobal warming has often been described as one of the most serious environmental problems ever to confront humanity, as this problem is inextricably linked to the process of development and economic growth itself. Since greenhouse gases are generated by burning fossil fuels as in power plants, factories and automobiles, it is not easy to reduce emissions, since virtually every facet of our lives is intimately tied to the consumption of energy. Climate change is an unusually difficult issue for the people who make the decisions in democratic governments. First of all, the science is uncertain while governments have to make firm policy decisions, if only the decision to do nothing, long before these uncertainties can be resolved.

Political leaders are already beginning to overstate the clarity of the science in order to attract public support. A lot of money is now going into climate research, and new findings with varying political implications will continue to appear.

Any serious attempt to cut emissions will have clear and immediate costs, but the benefits may not appear for a long time. To the extent that the benefits may be disasters that didn't happen, they may never be obvious. But the costs will be. As the debate develops, much of it is being cast in terms of the restraint that the present generation owes to future generations.

**U**nlike many other environmental issues, such as local air or water pollution, or even stratospheric ozone depletion caused by chloroflourocarbons (CFCs), global warming poses special challenges due to the spatial and temporal extent of the problem – covering the globe and with decades to centuries time scales. Again, in this particular issue, science has played, and continues to play, a critical role in defining the structure and basis of the debate. The following three dimensions of the issue illustrate the vexing features of the science underlying the problem:

i) Cumulative effect of the historical emissions. The climate system acts as a large integrator, that is, the response of the system is a result of the *entire history* of the forcing being applied.

ii) Lags in the system. The response of the ocean-atmosphere system occurs several decades to centuries after the changes in the atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations. As a result, even if emissions of greenhouse gases were stabilised immediately, it would take many years for the climate system to reach a new quasi-steady state, and some changes (such as sea level rise) would continue to happen.

iii) The actual consequences of climate change are likely to exhibit considerable spatial and temporal variability – thus some regions may actually experience a transition to a milder, warmer, wetter, and overall better climate regime. As a result,

there are costs as well as benefits associated with climate change; although the scientific consensus is clearly that the overall effects are likely to pose a significant burden.

**H**ow have we tried to respond to climate change? Negotiations began in 1991 under United Nations auspices to formulate an international treaty on global climate protection. Those negotiations resulted in the completion by May 1992 of a Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC). The Convention was opened for signature at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, and it entered into force in March 1994.

The Convention has few binding requirements. It calls for nations to limit carbon dioxide and other greenhouse emissions, by 'addressing anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals through sinks of greenhouse gases....' It does not set out specific targets or timetables for reducing emissions. It only requires the developed country signatories to formulate and adopt policies that aim at stabilising greenhouse gas emissions at 1990 emission levels, recognising that 'the return by the end of the present decade to earlier levels of anthropogenic emissions... would contribute to... modifying longer term trends in anthropogenic emissions consistent with the objective of the Convention... to achieve... stabilisation of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.'

The Convention adopted the notion of *common but differentiated responsibility*, recognising that the global climate was a common resource and responsibility, but that there were clear asymmetries between the developed and the developing coun-

tries in terms of both the past and present contributions to the problem as well as the resources to respond to it. That is, the developed countries are, by far the largest emitters of CO<sub>2</sub> and other greenhouse gases. At the same time, they also have the technical and financial resources to try and reduce their emissions. Two broad groupings of countries emerged after the Convention, the countries listed in Annex-1 of the Convention, or the developed countries, and the others. Countries such as Russia or Ukraine (parts of the former Soviet Union) although a part of the Annex-1 countries are placed in a special category as Economies in Transition.

At the time of the Rio Summit, proponents of more specific, legally binding targets and timetables for reducing greenhouse gas emissions successfully urged follow-on talks leading to future negotiation of a protocol or other legal instrument in order to strengthen the Framework Convention. In 1995, the Parties to the Framework Convention at their first meeting in Berlin, Germany, declared that commitments made in 1992 to reduce greenhouse gas emissions were inadequate to meet the objective of the Convention. So-called 'next steps' were needed to confront the potential of global warming in the

post-2000 time frame. Consequently, the Parties agreed to a process, set forth in their 'Berlin Mandate', of analysis and assessment of just what next steps might be taken to limit greenhouse gas emissions.

This process resulted in the negotiation of a protocol, the final details of which were completed at the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention held 1-12 December 1997, in Kyoto, Japan. The Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change commits industrialised nations to specific, legally binding emission reduction targets for six greenhouse gases: carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorinated compounds, and sulfur hexafluoride. The protocol was opened for signatures on 16 March 1998.

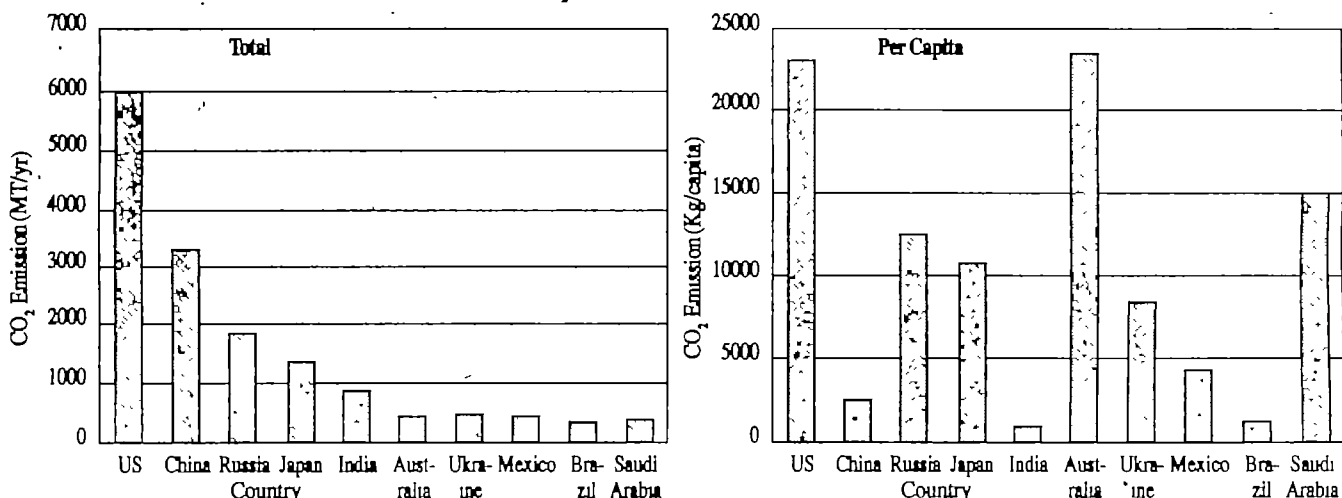
International political implications have proven significant. By far the majority of greenhouse gases are emitted by sources in industrial and transportation sectors (especially automobiles) that are concentrated in developed countries. These countries have shown concern not only about their own emissions, but about increased emissions from poorer countries as they expand their economies. Friction has been evident in the

debates over which actions, by developed and developing countries should be undertaken, on what schedules, and which parties should pay incremental costs for mitigation measures. Developing countries generally have argued that the financial burden of change should be borne by developed countries, which are mainly responsible for current atmospheric change due to human activity.

Figure 2 helps put in perspective the source of some of the differences between the developed and the developing countries, by showing for about 10 selected countries the total and per capita emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> in 1995. While some of the developed countries such as China and India do appear to have large emissions, on a per capita basis they are still negligible as compared to any of the developed countries.

As the Framework Convention (FCCC) states, the basic goal of the negotiation process is to return the concentrations of greenhouse gases to a level that prevents dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system. The simplest way of conceptualising this goal is to consider a target or limit for the atmospheric concentrations of the greenhouse gases set at a level that does not lead to unacceptable climate change.<sup>2</sup> Of

Annual Emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> from Selected Countries: total, and per capita



course, since our ability to predict future climate change is very limited, the notion of what is 'unacceptable' is itself quite imprecise and fuzzy. In this conceptualisation, the economic activities in different countries that lead to greenhouse gas emissions correspond to this limit or resource being used up.

The entire negotiation process then may be regarded as an effort to address the following three questions: (i) What exactly is the limit, and how should it be defined? (ii) What is the basis that ought to be used for the manner in which different countries can use up this resource? (iii) What are the instruments that could be used to divide up and actually distribute this resource to the different countries once the allocation basis has been determined?

**T**he first question centres around the level of atmospheric concentrations that would be considered acceptable in view of the possible consequences of climate change. A related issue is whether the limit would be specified individually for each greenhouse gas, or whether some sort of a 'basket' approach could be used where countries could trade-off amongst the different gases. This issue depends critically on whether the effects of the different gases could be made commensurate with each other through a set of equivalences<sup>3</sup> and if greater flexibility or economy would be

2. For example, a value for long term atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentration of 500-550 ppmv has often been used in the discussions. This value then defines the size of the resource that can be 'used up'.

3. Equivalences have indeed been suggested in the form of 'global warming potentials', an index that attempts to capture the ability of each gas to cause changes in the climate system. However, since different gases have different lifetimes in the atmosphere, and since the entire history of forcing is important, this becomes a fairly complex problem.

obtained. It has also been suggested that rather than concentrate on the greenhouse gas concentrations, it may be better to focus on the sinks for these gases – which is primarily the terrestrial biosphere and the oceans.

The second question centres around the basis for the allocation and is currently the subject of much debate. Large, populous developing countries like India and China would clearly favour a per capita basis, as it gives them the greatest scope for increasing emissions further in their development processes.

The final question deals with the approach to be followed once the allocations have been determined. A large variety of market based instruments such as taxes and tradable permits have been deployed for conventional pollutants such as sulphur dioxide and there is much research on their applicability in the climate context. However, the key issue to recognise here is that any instrument will necessarily have to address large scale technology and monetary transfers since developing countries could, in principle, 'sell' their allocations to the developed countries.

**F**or India, the climate change issue has several ramifications: First, although India does not currently have any obligations under the Convention to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions, international pressure will keep increasing in this regard. It is therefore important for us to develop a clear understanding of our emission inventory. We also need to document and analyse our efforts in areas such as renewable energy, wasteland development and afforestation – all of which contribute towards either reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions or increasing CO<sub>2</sub> removal from the atmosphere. Considering that these efforts may often be undertaken for a variety

of reasons not directly related to global warming, but yet have benefits as far as climate change is concerned, we may be able to leverage such efforts in the international context.

Second, we need to develop a clear and well articulated position on each of the three basic questions indicated earlier. This position needs to be supported by appropriate analysis. The Indian research community could contribute substantially in this regard.

**F**inally, we need to recognise that even if countries do undertake immediate and rapid action to reduce their emissions, some degree of climate change is inevitable. If we consider the fact that we have very limited abilities to deal with weather extremes in the present day, the situation may get worse in the future. Therefore, we need to significantly improve our ability to plan and adapt to extreme events such as floods, droughts, cyclones and other meteorological hazards. Any robustness that we build into the system in this regard will always stand us in good stead, no matter what climate change actually transpires.

## References

- Authoritative reviews of the science underlying the climate change issue are provided by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). See, for example:
- J.T. Houghton, et al. eds., *Climate Change 1995: the science of climate change*. Cambridge University Press, 1996, and, James P. Bruce, et al. eds., *Climate Change 1995: economic and social dimensions of climate change*. Cambridge University Press, 1996. The IPCC also maintains a website at [www.ipcc.ch](http://www.ipcc.ch).
- A good introduction to the costs of reducing emissions is provided by Robert Repetto and Duncan Austin, *The Costs of Climate Protection: a guide for the perplexed*, World Resources Institute, Washington, 1997.
- The Framework Convention secretariat operates a website at [www.unfccc.de](http://www.unfccc.de), which provides very complete information on the entire negotiation process, as well as the actual Convention and Protocol documents.

# Ecological uncertainty, institutions and myths

VASANT K SABERWAL

THE Malthusian spectre of impending disaster, most typically visualised in the form of Himalayan slopes slipping away and desert boundaries expanding into fertile tracts, have taken centre stage in much of the discourse on environmental degradation of the past century. Within this discourse, Himalayan erosion has invariably been attributed to the subsistence practices of an expanding farmer and agro-pastoralist population; the expansion of deserts to overgrazing by pastoralist communities in Rajasthan, sub-Saharan Africa, West Asia and elsewhere (Eckholm 1975, 1977; Myers 1986).

There are problems with this discourse, most notably the recent demonstration of the flaws in many of its underlying ecological assumptions. While the occurrence of localised degradation is well accepted, shifts in

the boundaries of the Sahara desert are no longer seen as unidirectional and caused by human agents. The 'advance' or 'retreat' of the desert's boundaries is increasingly associated with climatic changes rather than anthropogenic pressures (Forse 1989, Binns 1990, Tucker et al. 1991). Large scale erosion in the Himalayan mountains and the annual flooding in the Indo-Gangetic plains, have similarly been linked to geomorphological characteristics and tectonic and climatic events interacting with a wide variety of anthropological pressures, rather than merely the flawed subsistence practices of farming and pastoral communities (Hamilton 1987, Ives and Messerli 1989, CSE 1991, Heimsath in this issue of *Seminar*). I propose to use this essay to examine the institutional dynamics by which such myths are sustained.



A caveat, and one that will recur: the argument presented here is not that there is a paucity of environmental problems; there are plenty of them. There is, however, an overarching rhetoric about much of the environmental discourse that ultimately clouds our understanding of a given issue, thereby resulting in intervention by the state or by NGOs that is either not required, or misdirected to the point of introducing its own negative dynamic. It is because of this potential for misdirected intervention that there is a need to better understand the nature of environmental myths and the processes by which they come into being.

**A** part of the explanation lies in the nature of ideas that are available as part of a more general societal discourse on nature and the environment. In a sense these ideas represent source material that feeds into the story telling process. Confronted with an environmental disaster such as a flood or a drought, societies have historically come up with one of three explanations: a natural occurrence, divine retribution for the misuse of resources, or human over-exploitation of limited resources, leading to a disturbance in the 'delicate balance' of nature. In the mid-19th century, there was a spurt of writing on this notion of an imbalance brought about by the reckless consumption of resources – particularly in the form of massive deforestation in many parts of Europe and the United States (Marsh 1864).<sup>1</sup> It is this notion of human responsibility that has come to dominate the discourse on environmental degradation over this past century. There is limited space provided to explanations of

these events as cyclical, natural processes.<sup>2</sup>

At least two factors have worked to ensure the adoption of such a position. One of these is the uncertainty that characterises our understanding of many environmental processes. The other is the opposition that foresters, conservationists and others have to deal with in implementing any policy that curbs the consumption of resources. I will argue here that these two factors – ecological uncertainty on the one hand and opposition to conservation on the other – interact to produce a specific, alarmist discourse on environmental degradation.

**B**ecause of the extreme complexity of ecological systems, it is almost always difficult to identify causality with regard to a given phenomenon. There are often a multiplicity of factors working to generate a given dynamic. These include climatic variation from one year to the next, geologic variations, tectonic instability, as well as human actions that reduce vegetation cover, compact the soil and so on. Separating the relative impacts of these different influences on large scale ecological processes, such as floods, desertification and so on, takes many years of research, requiring the setting up of controls and experimental replicates. In turn, setting up appropriate controls and replicates is difficult owing to the highly dynamic (hence, continually changing) situations one is dealing with (Hilborn and Ludwig 1993) as well as the extreme heterogeneity that characterises most landscapes.<sup>3</sup> Experimental research

aimed at teasing apart these various influences in shaping the environment, particularly vis-à-vis the Himalaya, is conspicuously absent in much of the literature.

**W**hile there is insufficient evidence to support the idea that the Sahara desert is moving southward, the imagery of an expanding desert is strongly linked to famine in sub-Saharan Africa. Famine has, of course, been very real in this part of the world over the past two decades, and has been responsible for extreme deprivation suffered by many millions of Africans. Similarly, there is an undeniable reality to the flooding within the Indo-Gangetic plains and huge losses of life and damage to property are reported annually. Once again, the imagery of water rushing off the Himalayan slopes owing to the absence of protective vegetative cover is a powerful call to afforest the Himalaya, even though such afforestation is unlikely to reduce flooding damages in the floodplain (see Ives and Meserli 1989, CSE 1991).

We have here an intermingling of fact and uncertainty, and it is the reality of each situation that allows for the development of a powerful and coherent 'story' with regard to environmental degradation. As pointed out above, a major problem with each of these situations is in the attribution of causality. How does one separate anthropogenic pressures from naturally occurring phenomenon such as climate, tectonic instability and geomorphology in the shaping of particular features of the landscape? Is

cated and controls easily established – each of these key ingredients of scientific research – doing the same in environmental research is rarely possible. Where suitable experimental designs can be devised, these tend to be over extremely small areas, and the extrapolation to the level of the watershed or a similar landscape is generally unwarranted.

1 This was not, of course, a new idea, for the idea that 'nature' was in a state of delicate balance, probably of divine creation, can be traced to Christian mythology (Worster 1995)

2 Such an acknowledgement would not imply the need for adopting a fatalistic acceptance of these processes. It would, however, suggest the need for adopting different interventionist strategies as a means of alleviating the very real suffering that accompanies these events

3 Unlike laboratory situations, where all variables can be manipulated, experiments repli-

desertification caused by changing rainfall patterns or by overgrazing? Is Himalayan erosion caused by tectonic instability, overgrazing, faulty road-construction, high levels of rainfall? How do these factors interact with each other in creating conditions that lead to massive landslides?<sup>4</sup>

**A**tributing primary to one or another of these factors in shaping the environment is a complicated task, and yet one that has been done routinely, and often with a great deal of conviction. Remarkably, in each of these instances, bureaucracies and environmental scientists have come up with the same causal explanation, time after time, despite the tremendous variation in issues and sites under discussion: it is the growing pastoralist population that is held responsible for the civilisation-threatening southward advance of the Sahara desert; it is the growing human population pressures that are held responsible for the declining forest cover in the west African savanna (see Leach and Fairhead in this issue of *Seminar*); and it is growing human population pressures in the Himalaya that are held responsible for the flooding in the plains.

A large part of the problem, as outlined above, lies with the difficulties of understanding large scale processes in nature. But that's not the only problem, for were that the case, one would expect explanations of degradation to vary from one context to another. Instead, there is a highly predictable ascription of causality of degradation to human, and more specifically sub-

sistence, land use practices. Also, a general suggestion of environmental doom pervades much of the writing on the subject. Why is this so?

I will make the case below that the explanation for this shaping of the environmental discourse lies in a selective pressure that operates on environmentalists to adopt specific positions.

**S**elective pressure comes from the overwhelming absence of popular or political support for conservation policies. Such opposition is natural, given the conservationists' focus on restricting individual access to resources and imposing curbs on resource consumption. Those immediately affected by restrictive policies—cultivators, pastoralists and others dependent upon forest resources for their livelihood or survival—have of course opposed such measures. More interestingly, however, there has also been a great deal of resistance from within the government, particularly from government departments whose political clout declines with the ascendancy of conservation departments, such as happened with the Indian forest department.

Within India, the single most important department to object to policies proposed by the Indian forest department was the revenue department. Until the mid-19th century, the revenue department had sole control over land resources. With the emergence of the forest department in the 1850s, and particularly with the introduction of the Indian forest acts of 1865 and 1878, there was a significant increase in the prominence of the latter and a corresponding decline in the revenue department's control over forest lands. Consequently, revenue departments in most parts of India mounted a concerted effort to clip the forest department's wings as it were.

Within Himachal Pradesh, for example, the revenue department successfully resisted the handing over of large tracts of forest land to the forest department, on grounds that the policies of the latter restricting local access to forests would translate into heightened local dissatisfaction and consequently, increased political activity. It was only in the 1970s and 1980s that the forest department managed to gain control over most forest lands in the state. The revenue department also successfully subordinated officials of the forest department to the control of the revenue department, ensuring that a revenue official could always overturn a decision taken by a forester. There remained a strong undercurrent of hostility between the two departments well into the 1950s (Ravi Rajan 1994), and in many parts of the British Empire. Similar accounts of departmental jostling for administrative prominence and, therefore funding, are also reported from the United States (Schiff 1962 and Dodds 1969).

**T**he above is a sketchy and rather brief outline of a power struggle that took place between the forest and revenue departments between the 1850s and the 1950s. There is ample evidence for this conflict (see Guha 1990, Ravi Rajan 1994, Saberwal 1999, Sivaramakrishnan 1999), and so I will not dwell further on the conflict itself. What is more interesting is to examine the manner in which such opposition towards conservation policies interact with an uncertain understanding of ecological processes to generate specific kinds of myths about the environment.

For the forest department to suggest an unclear understanding of the problem, or any level of uncertainty, would be unthinkable, if only because such an admission would play into the hands of those favouring a loosening

4. Since other articles in this issue of *Seminar* have addressed some of these questions, and examined the relative impacts of different factors in causing erosion, flooding, desertification etc., I will not attempt to provide answers to these questions. My primary interest in this article deals with the issue of why certain kinds of environmental myths are created, not in examining the myths themselves.

of environmental controls. To suggest that flooding in the plains and large scale erosion are primarily naturally occurring processes would be equally *unthinkable*, since it would open the door to increased timber harvesting in the Himalaya. After all, the basic premise of the current ban on timber harvesting from the Himalaya is the idea that the presence of forests are the best safeguards against flooding in the plains, and that the removal of these forests would greatly exacerbate an already bad situation. Similarly, any attempt to downscale the importance of the environmental services provided by Himalayan forests from one of preventing flooding to one of providing fuelwood and fodder to people living within the region – both of which are in short supply – would dramatically reduce the significance of the measures suggested by the forest department.

**A** downscaling of the problem from the national to a local context, would of course, have consequences for the huge amounts of international and central government aid that pours into these regions, with consequences for both the indigenous and the western bureaucrats running ‘last ditch efforts’ to prevent the Sahara from moving south, or of the Himalaya sliding away forever. It is important to note here that such last ditch efforts have been ongoing since the early 20th century, if not earlier.<sup>5</sup>

At least two other analysts have linked ecological uncertainty to the formulation of conservation policy. Wargo (1996) and Beck (1995) argue that the U.S. and German governments respectively have understated the threats from pesticides and industrial pollution, and invoked an insuf-

ficiency of knowledge or an uncertain understanding of ecological processes, to counter environmentalist demands for a reduction in pesticide use and industrial growth. In particular environmentalist concerns about global warming and ozone depletion are challenged by governments and industry supporters on the grounds of the difficulty of separating the climatic impacts of industrial emissions from naturally occurring climate change. Identifying causation, in other words, is problematic. The imposition of restrictions that would slow economic growth, argue powerful economic interests, would be unwarranted given our poor understanding of the links between industrial emissions and environmental concerns. Although Wargo and Beck focus primarily on the politics of pesticide and industrial pollution in the western world, the same argument is likely to be made in the developing world, at least in the context of industrial pollution.

**O**ne observes an interesting twist in the relationship between ecological uncertainty and environmental degradation, within the context of issues such as soil erosion and deforestation, overwhelmingly linked to subsistence land use practices of a poor and exploding human population. Invariably, descriptions of land degradation impute a high degree of accuracy to our understanding of ecological processes, with regard to both the magnitude and the causal agent responsible for the problem. The difference in the expressed state response to the two issues, industrial pollution on the one hand and deforestation and soil erosion on the other, despite the uncertainty common to both, appears to relate directly to the agents considered responsible for the degradation – industry in the first instance, and pastoralists, shifting cul-

tivators, and settled cultivation in the latter. This inconsistency is internally consistent with a class analysis of who profits from and who bears the costs of state imposed curbs on resource consumption.

**T**he greatest environmental myths, of course, have been composites of a certain reality to large scale human suffering, uncertainty to our understanding of complex phenomenon, and a great deal of opposition to government agencies attempting to control a given resource. The reality of the misery associated with the famine in sub-Saharan Africa is undeniable, as is the destruction that accompanies the annual flooding in the Indo-Gangetic plains. Such suffering requires a response from the state and from society. It is the experts within a bureaucracy who have to deal with these situations, yet a poor understanding of processes has often resulted in a poorly developed intervention response.

This is not to suggest an intentionality to forester/environmentalist distortion of facts. The argument, rather is that the institutional/political space does not exist within which conservationists can admit of an uncertainty to their understanding of ecological processes. Doing so would merely undermine their own authority, particularly so in the face of concerted opposition to conservation policies.

Once again, I am not suggesting the absence of environmental degradation. There are numerous contexts in which there is a continual whittling away of resources, with significant consequences for people in terms of fuelwood and fodder. There is quite clearly a need for better management of these resources. Yet, when couched in an overarching rhetoric that links a decrease in vegetation cover in the hills with massive levels of soil ero-

5. Saberwal (1999) demonstrates a long-term continuum with regard to an alarmist discourse on environmental degradation in the Himalaya

sion and with the annual flooding in the plains, the focus of attention turns to the obviously much larger 'national' issues of flooding and soil erosion. The solutions are tailored to accommodate our understanding of the problem – not enough tree cover leads to high levels of erosion and heightened flooding in the plains. Solution – plant more trees, preferably fast growing species.<sup>6</sup>

A consideration of the problem at the local level, on the other hand, leads us down an entirely different path – the provisioning of local communities with adequate supplies of fodder and fuelwood. How we go about doing this must vary from one place to the next – but the planting of fast growing pine species is clearly not part of the solution, particularly since pine species greatly reduce the local availability of forage. Forage producing trees may need to be planted in certain areas, but there could also be the planting of grass, an equally effective means of ensuring the conservation of soil and water, while providing much needed forage to villagers.

**T**his essay examines what I consider key elements that have contributed to the construction and sustenance of myths regarding environmental degradation. In many ways the argument that opposition to curbs on resource consumption will force a conservation agency to exaggerate threats of environmental degradation, is embarrassingly obvious. It should come as little surprise to hear that bureaucrats in every sphere of activity will use whatever evidence and argument they can

to justify the continued existence of their office, or, better still, to justify an increased establishment for their office.

**W**e are all familiar with grandiose tales of success and achievement – tales that further justify the continuance of a given department. Such tales are one component of a conservation agencies claims to continuance, the other is the doomsday scenario that will unfold in the absence of environmental restrictions imposed and monitored by the same agency. What is perhaps less obvious, however, is the lack of accuracy to much of our knowledge on the environment, the extreme difficulties of separating natural from anthropogenic influences in shaping the environment, and the manner in which this uncertainty can be shaped into a particular, alarmist discourse on degradation.

By engendering overarching, and therefore simplistic explanations of degradation, environmental discourse often precludes an effective understanding of how landscapes are shaped, even as it provides a rationale for highly targeted conservation programmes premised on an accurate understanding of system functioning. The consequences of such a discourse include a poor handling of the actual problem – flooding, desertification – while also posing potentially serious livelihood and subsistence problems for local communities.

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6. But even here, one must note the high levels of timber extraction by the forest department over the past century, with well over 20 million cubic feet of timber being removed annually, as late as the 1970s. There is a clear contradiction in the stated concern of the forest department and its own role in the deforestation of the Himalaya.

# Interview

**Anil Agarwal**, founder director of the Centre for Science and Environment is arguably one of our best-known environmentalists. He, more than most, has been responsible for placing environmental issues on the political and policy agenda. In this interview he outlines the dangers inherent in a flawed, romantic reading of complex environmental problems.

*This issue of Seminar tries to separate myth from reality in the discourse on environmental degradation. Researches in various parts of the world, and in India, indicate that the issue of degradation has both been overstated in terms of its magnitude as well as in the attribution of causality. It is often argued that a growing cattle population is responsible for desertification, particularly in the Sahara. Equally, the issue of flooding in the Indo-Gangetic plains has been attributed to overgrazing in the Himalaya. CSE's Third Citizen's Report questions some of these arguments, as does other research, to the point where they are now being called environmental myths. What is your position on this debate?*

I think the problem lies more with the nature of the environmental movement. It has, at one level, been very anti-science because scientific developments, when they get translated into technological developments, usually lead to environmental problems. Given the fact that technologies today are applied on a massive scale and the interventions in eco-systems are substantial, they may result in major environmental problems.

Technological systems existed long before the industrial revolution, but on a much smaller scale. Today, however, economic growth in the world is at a much higher level. There are financial resources to

implement technology on a bigger scale. Consequently, new innovations usually get applied on a much bigger scale, whereas in earlier times the scale was different. Over time people learnt which technologies worked or which were not sustainable and these were slowly weeded out. Today, long before it is apparent whether a technology is unsustainable, like for example diesel cars, you have five million diesel cars on the road, and only 10-15 years later the horror is realized. So there has definitely been, for valid reasons, an anti-scientific streak.

On the other hand it is to be appreciated that how human intervention affects nature is an intensely scientific issue. Nature lends itself to deep scientific analysis and therefore, human intervention, whatever be the form – agriculture, industry, services, population growth – its impact on the environment has to be scientifically analyzed. And this is where the environment community sometimes tends to be lackadaisical.

Though within the environment movement there are various sets of people, we must recognize that the environmental concerns of the past 15-20 years have grown because of scientific concern. Rachel Carson was a scientist whose work gave rise to the American environmental movement, with her concern about pesticides. It was science that helped us understand that the use of DDT was leading to a thinning of the bald eagle's egg shells and that the eagles were dying. This created concern about the need to control poisonous chemicals. The depletion of the ozone layer and climate change are again something scientists warned us about. So there is this one streak which is valuable.

Nevertheless, another streak of environmentalism tends to be dismissive of science and operates on

its own whims and fancies. There are also all kinds of professional and non-professional activists. This is why one occasionally comes across a problem which may be described as an environmental myth – a myth that environmentalists have created.

Now some of these myths can be out of ignorance. Let me mention my own case. I am convinced that the scientific evidence about the particles that diesel creates is cause for deep concern. But science is still evolving; it is not as if we have the final answers. It is possible that 10 years later there may be evidence to suggest that perhaps this is not so serious.

However, as a good environmentalist I would argue that since evidence exists to show that there is a likelihood of it causing cancer, allergies and so on, we cannot wait because we are dealing with human lives. If it were a matter of choice whether we should have a petrol or a diesel car, I would say no to a diesel car – that under no circumstances do I want it. This is not a scientific myth as there is scientific evidence, there is scientific concern, there is scientific debate and major institutions are involved.

But there are scenarios where people just run a bit too fast – take the claims that the deforestation of the Himalaya is the cause of floods. Scientists have analyzed the situation and found that this is not really a major cause. The evidence is really simple. The Himalaya are the youngest mountain system in the world, the most erodable, lashed by the heaviest rainstorms that any mountain system faces, and at the same time they are very seismic. So, overall, they are major producers not only of water but also silt. When a massive rainstorm hits erodable mountains, already shaken up because of seismic disturbances, a massive amount of soil flows down. The silt fills up riverbeds and therefore the rivers move course. That's what you call floods and it is inevitable. It does not mean that nothing should be done about floods, but that the real answer does not lie in the forests of the Himalaya – it lies somewhere on the floodplains itself.

*Scientific interest about the problem existed prior to the current situation that you describe. Why was there such widespread acceptance of the notion that the lack of forests and land use in the Himalaya are directly responsible for floods?*

As I said, ideas gained ground and were widely accepted before being subjected to rigorous scientific analysis. There was a widespread belief that when trees are removed, it contributes to erosion. True. If an area is deforested, it will definitely lead to erosion. This

general principle was applied to all ecosystems without realizing that every ecosystem has its own differentiated response. This led environmentalists to believe that deforestation leads to soil erosion and therefore to floods.

Not only does this kind of thinking prevail, vested interests exist as well. As much as the environmentalists making such claims, this became a convenient argument for others. Take a simple example: Chandi Prasad Bhatt, for instance, was upset with me for arguing that deforestation in the Himalaya is not the main cause of floods, maybe because he himself had promoted the argument that if women hug the trees to protect them from being cut, it would also help the people in the plains. My argument is that women need to hug their trees because it is important for their own lives, to minimize the local impact of any environmental damage. Therefore, they have every right to do so. But this does not mean that the argument be extended to something that is not valid.

I also had a political concern. Chandi Prasad ji was essentially saying that there was a need to do something as it was important for the people in the plains. In the hierarchy of things this is like stating that people in the plains are politically more important than people in the mountains. I think people in the hills have every right, as much as people in the plains, to live and demand their right to the environment and to decide what is good for them – not because it is good for anybody else, particularly the more powerful.

The more powerful should be making space for the less powerful rather than the other way around. But Chandi Prasad ji had been saying that all his life. And he also believed that because of soil erosion, other ills follow. Of course, there may be problems at the local scale, but not necessarily at the subcontinental level.

Now then – on the other side is the professional lobby, the forester's lobby for example, which largely is quite unscientific. It saw that money was to be made through watershed development, afforestation and so on, and presented the same argument: that it will stop the floods. So there came to exist an entire set of arguments which became science-proof, almost like a vested interest.

For me the real answer lies elsewhere. We need to follow a precautionary principle while dealing with environmental issues. We need to take cognizance of science very quickly. Also, to have a healthy distrust of technological development, for whatever be its nature, when applied on a massive scale, it can have serious environmental impacts. As good environmen-

talists, one must be sceptical of these tendencies. Simultaneously one must take cognizance of any scientific evidence of damage at an early stage, not wait for a crisis before taking action.

*You sometimes indicate that the worst of India's land-based problems are perhaps behind us, that in the case of JFM (joint forest management) and a variety of other contexts, we are encouraging a better use of land resources, mainly centered around better village-level involvement. That in some sense, perhaps forest cover and the general use of land resources is today not as bad as it was 10-15 years ago.*

That is not what I've said. I said something quite different – that the problems are probably as bad today as they were before. There are some problems that have not worsened as much as we had feared. But that does not mean they have not worsened. Forests, for example. But, what we can say is that we do know how to reverse certain ecological changes. Whether the answers are applicable on a big scale depends on political will. It is quite possible they will not be applied. After all, these problems affect the poor much more, and they are not an organized force. Politicians look to them only during elections. If this trend does not change, there is no reason to believe that the situation in the field will actually alter.

But I am confident that if we look at the hill, plateau, semi-arid to sub-humid region, receiving about 500 mm to 1500 mm rainfall, a region which is almost 50-60% of India – the Aravalis going on to the Chota Nagpur plateau, the Central highlands, the Satpuras, the Deccan plateau, the Eastern Ghats, the Western Ghats – it is possible for us to manage the ecosystems well. We have the technology and the institutional mechanisms to do that.

We still do not have any answers on how to manage our natural resource base in the Indo-Gangetic plains, particularly the lower part. It is the most flooded floodplains of the world. It also suffers from extreme poverty, unemployment and social stratification. And yet, this is a region for which we have few answers. This is also true of our mountain systems, particularly the humid slopes, where shifting cultivation is practised. We have no clear idea about what to do. So too for the arid zone, the desert area.

In the areas about which we know, the answer is simpler. Essentially we need to revive or put back into place the traditional systems, and which may still be there, though in a degraded state. But the traditional mechanisms we had in the areas of shifting cultivation

or nomadism, the question is whether we would like to retain those systems. Any answers that we look for would first have to answer this question. And that is where the major problem lies.

My approach would be to first learn to make the traditional systems sustainable. Many of these traditional lifestyles still exist. Nomadism is widespread in the desert – all the way from Kutch and Saurashtra into Rajasthan. Shifting cultivation is still a way of agriculture in most of the humid slopes, as is terraced farming in the Himalaya. We need to first look at these, nurture them back to stability and then slowly, as they begin to modernize and come into market agriculture, look at the issue of their transformation. The trouble is that if any effort is being made in these areas today, it is primarily to bring in modern market agriculture right away, with all its attendant environmental and social problems. NGOs have also not provided any outstanding example of a micro experience that we can hold up as a macro model. This is a major weakness.

I am not saying that we have the knowledge for the different regions of the country, for all the diverse ecosystems that exist. Yes, we have the knowledge to deal with a significant portion of India's ecosystems which harbor many of our poor, particularly tribal people. That it is possible to reverse the degradation and put the local economy back onto a sustainable footing. Whether it will happen is difficult to say. It all depends on political leadership.

It has happened in some places in this region, partly because of the drive of outstanding individuals who were able to change things. The problem is that the state rarely learns from them, rather it is dismissive. Intellectuals are equally dismissive, claiming that these are the efforts of unusual people. I disagree. These people appear outstanding only because they had extraordinary stamina, which was required because they had to face a pig-headed, obstinate, stupid bureaucracy. In order to deal with them they had to be super humans as the hurdles they had to cross were enormous. If there were no hurdles, then normal human beings would have been able to do something. That is what Digvijay Singh proved. That once a chief minister makes up his mind, and makes sure that his bureaucracy works together, in a concerted manner, with the people, then change is possible. Equally, it is clear that change has to be politically driven. Now the question is whether you would have the chief minister of Orissa doing the same to an area like Kalahandi or the chief minister of Rajasthan doing the same to the Aravali hills, the Sawai Madhopur plateau and so on.

I don't expect the bureaucracy to do it – because it's very clear from the Madhya Pradesh experience that inter-departmental coordination is extremely critical. Not only at the policy level, which is at the level of the state, but also at the implementation level, which is at the level of the district and the micro watershed. The only way the bureaucracy will work together is if there is a drive from the top.

*In your recent work one gets a sense that the biggest problems confronting environmentalists and people concerned about the environment is pollution – air and water pollution. That this problem is an order of magnitude different in terms of its impacts on the everyday life of a person?*

I am not sure if pollution is an order of magnitude bigger than the rural environment problems. In fact, I have always argued that rural environment problems are more important than urban environment ones – because they affect millions more. What is remarkable about the urban environmental problems is the speed with which they will grow, simply because the speed with which pollution grows with respect to the economy is quite astonishing.

This should not be a surprise to anyone looking back into environmental history. The biggest growth in the world economy took place after World War II, the post-war economic boom. But within 15 years of that boom, it was difficult to breathe in any big western city, be it Tokyo, London or Los Angeles. None of the rivers like the Thames or the Rhine were any cleaner than what the Yamuna is today – they were stinking sewers. This is precisely what is happening with economic growth in Asia. China is in a horribly polluted state, and Taiwan, Korea, Thailand are in a similar predicament. India, with its new found liberalization in economic matters, faces the same kind of problem.

A World Bank study indicated that when the Thai economy doubled, its pollution went up ten-fold. We ran that same model for India and found that while between 1975 and 1995 the Indian economy grew 2.5 times, industrial pollution went up four-fold, and vehicular pollution went up eight-fold. It is not entirely surprising that in the mid-80s Delhi was perceived as a clean city in terms of its air quality. In just 10 years, see the state Delhi is in. Imagine what will happen by adding 200,000 vehicles every year.

This problem can only grow. Even this co-relationship of India's economy growing 2.5 times and industrial pollution increasing four-fold is an underestimate, since the model uses economy-pollution

correlations of the US from the late 1980s. I don't think the Indian economy is anywhere near that – so pollution must be much worse. And we are just beginning to urbanize, industrialize, modernize our agriculture, and all this will pump up more poison into the environment. And that is really a frightening prospect, which means, in terms of livability, our urban habitat is going to be almost impossible.

*What are the specific, tangible manifestations of the emerging pollution scenario?*

Very simple – you can see the air pollution. It is serious, not just in Delhi but literally in every Indian city. The small towns are in a far worse state. Looking at some of the pollutant levels, Rajkot is rated as one of the worst cities in the world. Delhi is supposed to be the world's fourth most polluted city. But that is only because it is on a list of 20 cities the World Health Organization measures, which places it at number four. But it's not even the fourth most polluted in India. There are other cities that are worse than Delhi – Kanpur, Lucknow, and Rajkot – and there are many cities we don't even measure, like Srinagar where one would literally choke, the pollution is so bad. It's a special situation because it's a bowl inside a valley and during winter, there is inversion.

Water pollution is growing as well. Most of our small rivers, which have large human habitations and industrial growth centres in their proximity, are totally polluted. The Sabarmati is totally polluted; the Yamuna is badly polluted and these are not a small rivers. This trend will grow as there is no way to stop it.

*The density of industry and vehicles is far greater in the West than in India. Why is it that we have such difficulty in dealing with problems of pollution?*

Remember that this is a phase, a process in which the economy and the environment are interacting with each other. Also, in our industrialisation we are basically making use of low-grade technology. In the '70s, when the West realized there was a serious environmental problem, it made major investments. It showed discipline, made rules and regulations which it enforced. It also invested a lot of money in pollution control. We cannot do that because the technology we need to deploy is far too expensive. Our per capita incomes even today are not the same as those of Europe in the 1950s. Consequently, our capacity to invest in high-tech technologies is severely limited. So, if they were able to control pollution within a couple of decades, we'll probably take something like 4-5 decades at the earliest.



*But it's not just an issue of additional financial resources. There is clearly a regulatory context?*

Yes, and the important thing is that the western regulatory systems work. There was enormous public pressure, enormous public demand. The politicians responded to the extent that they had become electoral issues. In India they are not electoral issues, so the pressure on politicians is limited. And to the extent that such pressure exists, we are constrained by our systems, the laws and institutions which are totally corrupt, and incompetent as well. As nobody wants them to function, the incompetence does not bother the politician. There is no pressure on the politician, no pressure on the bureaucrat to deliver. Neither do we have the financial resources, nor do we have the regulating capacity to deal with these problems. So we are in a deep crisis. While on the one hand there is a sense of hope for the rural community, I despair for the urban sector. It's in a real deep crisis.

*Some reports in the past year suggest that the quality of Delhi's air has improved marginally. Is this correct?*

Well, nobody really knows. The data from the Central Pollution Control Board does not show that. Also, comparing Delhi this year with the last two years doesn't make sense. You need a long term data set to show that. So scientifically speaking, I totally disagree with these claims. But yes, one also has to recognize that the Supreme Court has taken many important decisions: totally unleaded petrol has been introduced in Delhi, 15 year old vehicles have been ordered out, and the order has been reasonably well implemented. Diesel fuel, earlier 0.5% sulphur is now 0.25% sulphur. There have been controls on polluting taxis and 3-wheelers. All this must have had some impact. Now whether that impact is to marginally reduce pollution or to marginally stabilize it in the face of the growing number of vehicles, or not increase to the extent it would increase otherwise is difficult to establish because we don't have hard data. All that I can say is, the Supreme Court is doing a good job, given that the government is doing nothing and Delhi is the only city in the country in which anything is being done to control pollution. I think it is good and must be commended but we have a long way to go.

*Would the Supreme Court's intervention merely result in a displacement of pollution or is it actually acting to enforce the introduction of controls that reduce the emission load?*

The point really is that we are in a crisis situa-

tion. And the Supreme Court is trying to deal with just one city, Delhi. Many of the orders that it passes can easily lead to displacement. For example, in some cases, it has ordered the closure of certain factories. But politicians will find it difficult to close them down because of pressure from the moneybags. There will also be pressure from labour seeking jobs. The only option the politicians have is to relocate the industries.

What is being done is to move industry out from one unregulated area to another unregulated area. But, if there was proper regulation elsewhere, then it would go from an unregulated area to a regulated area, and one wouldn't expect the same pollution to take place there.

I don't know how the Supreme Court can deal with it. It is after all a small body. It cannot replace a government and do everything on its own. I guess everyone will learn as they go along. If the Supreme Court is serious, stays committed to this issue for a long time, it will realise that if problems go elsewhere, then people from those areas will have to come up and say, 'My lord, this industry is polluting here as well, action needs to be taken'. Should the Supreme Court again move them around, a time will finally come when there is no place left but the sea. It is a long drawn out process, but you cannot blame anybody, at least not the one agency that is trying to do something. If anyone is to be blamed, it is the government which has created an all-around crisis. You can't be saying, I'll either have the best or have nothing at all.

*What are the specific indicators, health wise or economy wise, of a deteriorating situation?*

Well, in terms of health, clearly there will be a serious problem. We will see what Dr Ramalingaswamy, former Director General of the Indian Council of Medical Research, calls the double burden of disease. There are already serious problems of vector-borne diseases, water-borne diseases like gastroenteritis, diarrhoea and all that. Now non-communicable diseases will come up in a big way, things like cancer. In Bhopal, 1 in 20 people have cancer, 1 in 7 in Delhi. The point is that a few million people will die as a result of atmospheric and water pollution. If that is acceptable as being just, as being morally okay, than that is what will happen. Currently, half a million die of water diseases and 100,000 of air pollution every year. *Thik hai*. So many have died of poverty in the past, now some will die of pollution. Not a big crisis in the sense that things will fall apart – just a question of how many people will die before we start doing something about it.

# Books

**HYBRID HISTORIES: Forests, Frontiers and Wildness in Western India** by Ajay Skaria. Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1999.

THIS long awaited book is a bold effort to write history in a radically different way, by a contrapuntal juxtaposition of professional history and Dangi stories of the past. Skaria argues that all history hitherto has lapsed into complicity with 'the hyperreal Europe' but that hybrid histories such as his will assist 'struggles against relations of domination' (p. 14). The method chosen is to structure the text around themes drawn from many 'true stories' (*khari goth*) collected during fieldwork in the Dangs – a mountainous, tribal dominated eastern district of Gujarat. The rich collection of stories gathered over many years attests to the author's perseverance and tenacity in conditions that few city-bred historians would tolerate.

The material collected is then ordered and presented in terms of an indigenous binary – the opposition of *moglai* and *mandini*. Skaria emphasizes that the contrast is not between two clearly demarcated periods, but rather between alternate regimes of power – *moglai* being marked by liberty to move in the forests, to plunder the plains, while *mandini* is characterized by the subordination of the Dangs to outsiders.

The book devotes seven chapters to the discussion of *moglai* and eleven to *mandini*. Each chapter interestingly cross-cuts a mass of information from diverse archives – in Ahwa, Baroda, Bombay and elsewhere – with the oral narratives collected by the author. The two are used to supplement each other.

These 18 chapters cover near 300 pages of closely written text, and it is obviously impossible to summarize them here. Indeed, the author's style, suggestive rather than argumentative, perhaps deliberately repels such logocentric exercises. Nonetheless, we may identify some recurrent tensions in Skaria's text.

Two of these are the effort to minimise, if not deny, difference among the Dangi communities and to highlight the extent to which they contest and deny 'plains' values. Yet the category Dangi itself is not historicised, even though Ghanshyam Shah – in a paper Skaria does not cite – described how it was being reconstituted barely 30 years ago. Similarly, by contrast to the richly textured study of Dangi life, the plains are seen as stereotypically dominated by Brahman-Kshatriya ideology. This would not be a serious defect if Skaria was arguing that the Dangs were an enclave, isolated from the flawed values of the surrounding civilization; in that case of course, the latter's traits would be of little relevance to the study of the Dangs.

But Skaria is too knowledgeable to hold such a naive view, and he devotes a closely documented chapter to show how Bhil chiefs participated in the making and unmaking of regional powers. Dangi self-identity 'in relation to forests, masculinity, femininity, modes of livelihood, raids and *giras* amongst other things, had significant resonances in surrounding plains communities rather than simply being opposed to the practices of these communities' (p. 148). But these practices are left largely to the reader's imagination, with a few mentions of Brahman and Rajput values thrown in to stimu-

late it. Indeed, some of the most interesting hybrid communities of the macro region – Muslim Rajputs, Qasbatis, alcohol-using Muslim Bhils – never figure in the narrative.

This absence of Islam is a major lacuna in the text. Yet one can hardly look at the records of the 18th and early 19th century without encountering Dongar Khan alias Dongrya Vesava, Tegkhan, Kader Bhaladar, Wahid Ali Khan, 'Abdool Momin oorf Luxdheer Dulput Rao III' Powar ruler of Peth, and also the numerous bands of mercenary Arabs, Pathans, Makranis and so on. The mercenaries make some appearances in Skaria's text, but as transient intruders who leave the essential Bhilness of the Dangs unaffected. Their significant role in enforcing the dominance of various chiefs in hill and plain alike is left unexplored. Similarly, the Kokni peasant underclass in 19th century Dang society is sought to be anachronistically assimilated to a modern Dangi identity, underplaying their own memories of a time when 'Bhil Rajas many a time oppressed their subjects with the help of their bowmen and took possession of their crops, cattle, food and even their girls' (Ghadvi village survey, Census of India 1961, p. 2).

In this context, Skaria's unwarranted transformation of a Maratha official's exhortation to the Bhils that it would be well if they ceased 'oppressing the peasants' into the milder 'opposing the peasants' (p. v) is not without significance. But all good ethnographers have been involved with their hosts and this richly textured study could not have been written by a cold devotee of the true/false dichotomy in the human sciences. It bears the marks, instead, of the Romantic revulsion from the scientific stance, and one can imagine Skaria, like Matthew Arnold's scholar-gypsy, 'Still nursing the unconquerable hope ... Still clutching the inviolable shade.'

Sumit Guha

**NATURAL PREMISES: Ecology and Peasant Life in the Western Himalaya 1800-1950** by Chetan Singh. Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998.

*Natural Premises* is a book that authoritatively describes the history of ecology and peasant life of a much neglected region of the Indian Himalaya. Until a few years ago there were only two categories of books describing the social life of this region – the richly detailed gazetteers that pertained to specific districts, and attractively designed tourist books. While gazetteers are still some of the best primary sources for

understanding the history of various regions of the state, there is no single book that deals with Himachal as a whole. Tourist books provide little more than a cursory glance at history, and have little analytical rigor.

Chetan Singh's book fits perfectly in the niche, a well researched book that describes the history and life within this region we now know as Himachal Pradesh. The author introduces his book as 'not only a description of the natural premises which constituted the *spatial* context *within* which the Himachal peasant lived, but also the natural premises which were the *logical* assumptions *upon* which he based his actions' (p. 5). While making a conscious attempt to stay away from ecological determinism, this book nevertheless is tied together through the rubric of ecological premises that the author argues defined and structured the socio-political history of this region. The history of settlements, agriculture, pastoralism, forests, markets and society are connected through the underlying theme of inter-linkages between environment, state and territoriality.

I enjoyed the thematic and non-chronological structure of this book that made for easy reading and also effectively highlighted the similarities among various regions of Himachal. After laying out a general schema, the author first highlights the links between environmental factors and political organization of pre-colonial states. Territoriality and the state's economic base are shown to be bounded by ecological constraints. This is followed by a chapter that shows how settlement patterns and agriculture in the region are also defined by the ecology. Local environment was so influential that there was no 'typical Himachal village' (p. 42), and the most common type of settlement was a hamlet located close to terraced fields.

Agriculture, unlike in the plains, was not the main or predominant activity, and it was closely linked with animal husbandry, pastoralism, commerce and forest use. The proportion of uncultivable land was high and subsequent chapters describe how these lands were integral to peasant life. Both these chapters use records from various regions of pre-colonial Himachal to substantiate the argument. These chapters, however, ignore the colonial period when political-economic concerns often overran or strongly modified these ecological premises.

One of the major achievements of this book is that it rigorously debunks many prevalent myths about hill society and life. Throughout the book the author presents an image of a vibrant society that is neither isolated nor traditional/backward. Although the money economy penetrated the Himachal countryside rather

slowly, even during pre-colonial times Himachal was linked to the larger trading networks of western Tibet and Central Asia.

The chapter on intermediate spaces is another example of the insightful analysis in the book that tackles common myths and misnomers. It also adds two crucial dimensions to the common property resources debate among environmental managers. First, the author unequivocally establishes the linkages and interdependence between hill agriculture and areas that have traditionally been called 'wastelands'. This buttresses current environmental wisdom that sees the ecosystem as a web of interdependent connections. 'Intermediate spaces' is a more appropriate term coined by the author for these lands that lie between cultivated areas and forests, since they are indispensable to hill agriculture. Second, the book also argues that there were no 'village communities' that collectively managed these lands; rather, in many cases there were private rights in these lands. This fact questions popular ideas about idyllic pre-colonial societies with benign and equitable property rights that were shattered by colonial intervention.

However, there are two levels of argument which can get fused in the assertion that there were no village communities managing the 'intermediate spaces'. The first denies the existence of village communities in general, and second, the particular role of these communities in managing these lands. The latter is substantiated by the author, but the former is arguable. At places the author asserts the former as well (as at pp. 208-209). As proof of this absence of community, the author shows that 'numerous available records argue, quite definitely, that the notion of community was alien to large parts of the region.'

The records the author refers to in support of his argument are mainly colonial ones. Indeed, as the author notes in his Introduction, the book is constructed mainly using colonial historical records (traveller's accounts, archival records, published settlement reports, and state and district gazetteers). While the lack of other local sources is understandable, the author seems uncritical of the colonial bias in these sources at various points in the book. Villages in Himachal had a village headman, had elaborate labour sharing arrangements, accepted community methods of resolving disputes, had common deities and celebrated festivities together. Thus, what was absent was a community similar to that encountered by colonial rulers in the plains of India. What seems lacking, as the author describes in a different chapter, is the notion of

property as defined by the colonial rulers. While broadly noting a colonial bias in the records used, the author uses these records uncritically in most parts of the book.

Another disappointment is that the theoretical structure of the book often promises much more than what is delivered. For instance, in the very first chapter, the author begins with a general emphasis on the external factors that aided state formation in this region. He accepts as persuasive Andre Gunder Frank's statement that 'political organization in those sedentary state societies was a function of their "external" relations as well as their "internal" needs. Indeed, many of their "internal" needs were "external" relations' (p. 8). However, in seeking to highlight that Himachal Himalaya is a coherent historical and political entity, the author often ignores the 'external' – the evolution of society in the plains and its constant interaction with this hill society.

Chetan Singh explains and describes state formation in Himachal only in terms of local geographic and ecological factors. External influences which may have substantiated Frank's argument like migration of Rajput princes to the hills after the Muslim invasions, colonial political economy and, above all, material, cultural and social influences from the plains (for instance the caste system) are hardly explored in the book. A deeper comparative discussion of state and society in Himachal Pradesh and its uniqueness or similarity with neighbouring regions would have added considerable depth of analysis to this book.

This book also attempts to create a history and identity for Himachal Himalaya as a distinct region. Himachal Pradesh is seen as a separate, unified ecological and socio-political entity. The author states in his Introduction, 'The entire region, despite its internal diversities, was an integrated whole' (p. 3). An entire chapter is devoted to pastoralists who followed specific paths across the altitudinal gradient and linked various regions. The chapter on exchange relations also highlights the interrelations between different areas. But the linkages and interactions that are outlined as evidence of this unity tend to be subregional rather than regional.

Whether it was the structure of settlements, pastoralist pathways, market exchanges, or social responses to them, these similarities and connections were restricted to specific subregions of what is today the state of Himachal Pradesh. Even if the mountainous nature of the region is taken as a primary linking factor, one needs to identify what distinguishes this

region from other neighbouring mountainous regions. It could be argued that the emergence of Himachal Pradesh in 1970 as a distinct and unified political entity as known today was the culmination of the political and economic processes initiated under and in response to colonialism. The premise of this book that Himachal Himalaya was a unified entity in pre-colonial and early colonial times is questionable and unsubstantiated.

However, much of this criticism is made possible by the clear and nuanced structure of the book. It is a pleasure to read and provides a vivid picture of life in Himachal Pradesh between 1800 and 1950. It is a rare book that highlights the primacy of environmental factors in the shaping of this hill society without falling into the trap of environmental or biogeographic determinism. Its uniqueness also lies in the challenge that the author has faced in bringing out the interplay between change and continuity during this distinct transitory period of history. It is essential for anyone with more than a cursory interest in this region. At a broader plane, this book will also be useful to environmental historians and those interested in society-environmental linkages

**Sudha Vasan**

**PASTORAL POLITICS: Shepherds, Bureaucrats and Conservation in the Western Himalaya by Vasant K. Saberwal. Oxford University Press, 1999.**

*Pastoral Politics* examines the environmental history (1865-1990s) of the nomadic pastoral community, the Gaddis of Himachal Pradesh, in relation to grazing resources and controls by the forest department. It questions the generally held view of increasing 'degradation' in soil and catchment hydrologic functions due to grazing, and illustrates in particular the use of half-baked pseudo scientific environmental rhetoric by bureaucrats to push their agenda of curbs on local use. The book is well organized and there is a smooth transition from the generic to the specific. Its main strength lies in the combination of a rigorous environmental historical study and the author's own observations and data from the present.

The hydrologic response of catchments to land use change is controlled by a complex function of ecologic, climatic and geomorphic processes. In general, a few key factors combine to limit our ability to quantitatively express the hydrologic and sedimentation response of a Himalayan mountainous catchment

to land use. These include the large inter-annual variability in precipitation, the heterogeneity of large catchments, natural sources of instability characteristic of a geologically and tectonically active young mountain system together with non-availability of high quality long term data on rainfall, stream flow and sedimentation. Even when these are available, rigorous experimental and statistical methods to separate the influence of human use from natural variability are required.

The history of the understanding of the role of forest vegetation in the hydrologic cycle in relation to other competing land use has often been marked by the prevalence of popular pseudo scientific myths. These could not later withstand scrutiny of experimentation and rigorous analyses. There was an over-simplified view of forests as generators of rainfall and regulators of stream-flow. It was generally assumed that dry season flow under forests exceeded that of other land use/land cover. These ideas were especially promoted by foresters around the world out of ignorance and later when challenged increasingly as a defensive posture.

These ideas spread among the then larger community of foresters and colonial administrators around the world and led to the development of what Saberwal calls the 'dessicationist' discourse. The broad sweep of this discourse included concerns over desertification, deforestation and degradation of forests. While many interesting historical developments in this discourse are described, the role of American writer, George Perkin Marsh's 'Man and Nature; or Physical Geography as Modified by Human Action' published in 1864, is left out. Drawing primarily upon European sources, his work was probably the first to trigger the 'dessicationist discourse' in the larger American community. The assumed role of tree planting and cultivation in attracting rain became a major dispute in the land use policies in the American West.

Coming home, the consolidation of British colonial administration over the hill and mountain forests of what is now Himachal Pradesh soon after 1865 empowered the government revenue and forest departments with their separate and often conflicting agendas and interests to manage forest resources. This invariably resulted in control over those dependant on them for their needs. One such group of people are the nomadic pastoral communities that ascended with their flocks of sheep and goats to grazing areas near and above the tree line in summer and descend to lower elevation forests in the winter.

There is a fascinating account of the bureaucratic response to real and assumed conflict of interests

between the resource needs of pastoral communities and competing state sanctioned use such as timber production and, in a specific case study, generation of hydroelectric power from 1870s to 1990s. In the latter, curbs on grazing were enforced on an experimental basis in order to gauge any resultant enhancement of winter flows. This Uhl valley experiment in watershed hydrology may well be the first one of its kind ever done in India, although Saberwal points out its limitations.

Well instrumented and rigorously conducted long term studies on land use impacts on watershed hydrology are still an exception in India. The author draws our attention to the use of scientific rhetoric and anecdotal, locale specific observations as opposed to real scientific scrutiny by the forest department officials to argue their case for restrictions on pastoral grazing. A more global 'alarmist' view of impending environmental degradation by an explosively growing population (the 'dessicationist discourse') influenced foresters' views on the effects of pastoral grazing on hydrology and soil erosion in the Punjab Himalaya.

The forest department held a long lasting view that grazing by nomadic graziers was detrimental to the objective of forest and soil conservation. In addition, the department also projected a view that population of grazing animals had increased substantially. Saberwal critiques and disputes these premises by quoting FD sources and official reports supplemented by his own observations. The curbs placed on nomadic graziers by the forest department were challenged first by the revenue department and later, after Independence, by successful political lobbying by the Gaddis that undermined the power of the forest department. The use of informal means by the Gaddis such as bribes and opening fences also ensured that curbs were honoured more in the breach. The tussle between the revenue and forest department reminds us that the state cannot be treated as a homogeneous political-economic entity.

The primary data presented by the author relates to effects of grazing on herb/forb biodiversity rather than soils, sedimentation and watershed hydrology, which is a departure from the main theme of the book. The author's own assertion based on limited data that the negative impacts of grazing on high altitude pasture biodiversity is not significant are not entirely convincing. Similar data and observations from the lower elevation areas have been excluded by the author's own admission due to severe problems with the space for time substitution and lack of controls.

Drastic effects of manure and urine accumulation from sheep are restricted to approximately 3 ha (100 m radius) around the site. The density of herder camps across the landscape over time scales of several decades which may have a bearing on biodiversity at larger spatial scales are not discussed. There is no mention of the nutrient enrichment and pollution downstream resulting from accumulation of manure in shepherd camping areas.

A section in the appendix to summarize the current understanding of the role of forests in the hydrologic cycle including infiltration, run-off, recycling of evapotranspired water as well their role in soil erosion and sedimentation would have been of benefit to those readers with an inadequate knowledge of these issues. Facts such as that trees consume more water than grass through evapotranspiration should have been explained in the context of effects of land use change in hydrology.

There is no mention of the more rigorously conducted hydrologic experiments in India. Reference to applied research initiatives on land use impacts on hydrology in India such as that of the joint Karnataka Forest Department/Institute of Hydrology, UK, G.B. Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment and Development in Sikkim or the experiments in the Nilgiris by the Central Soil and Water Training and Research Institute would have considerably enriched the book.

The final chapter argues for a more rigorous and data intensive approach to studying various anthropogenic influences on ecosystems (that is, barring a few exceptions, sadly missing in India) and questions the process that categorizes the state of the ecosystem as degraded. The new ideas on the role of grazing in maintaining biodiversity are mentioned. However, it is annoying to see the much repeated examples of Bharatpur (a human constructed wetland) and the Valley of Flowers, where more recent data may indicate otherwise, to support the idea that removal of grazing reduced desirable attributes and biodiversity.

In both cases there is no evidence or proof that had the status quo prevailed, desirable biodiversity would have been safeguarded or stated management goals achieved. Such linkages, made in hindsight with no controls, need to be made cautiously. Clearly, as the author points out, we need more studies that quantitatively and rigorously assess the effects of particular human activities on ecosystem functioning and stated management objectives. We should be able to at least address questions such as, 'How much livestock graz-

ing or non-timber forest produce harvesting is compatible with stated management objectives for a specific protected area?' Such studies should be the agenda of institutions such as the Forest Research Institute and the Wildlife Institute of India, in collaboration with scientifically oriented peoples' organizations and the forest department

Peoples' participation and their involvement in conservation are of course emphasized, although the example of Kaila Devi sanctuary in Rajasthan is ironic given that the book deals with the problems and prospects of nomadic graziers. The successful elimination of intensive sheep grazing by nomadic graziers that was considered degrading by *local* pastoralists and cultivators is celebrated. The impacts of these curbs on the evicted nomadic communities and effects elsewhere are ignored. The victory of settled over nomadic was complete in this case.

It should be mentioned that the use of pseudo scientific myths and rhetoric are not restricted to the forest department. NGOs and the environmental activists have frequently resorted to these. An example is the view that devastating floods and sedimentation in the Brahmaputra valley are primarily caused by deforestation in the Arunachal Himalaya rather than geomorphology and tectonics. Similarly, many NGOs propagate the rigid view that exploitation or use of forest biomass resources by resident tribal populations cannot be incompatible with conservation objectives. This is in sharp contrast to the past role of forest departments in defending industrial use of forest resources while coming down heavily on subsistence or local use.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized we need a collaborative network which brings together the forest department, scientists and peoples' institutions. The best possible science and a progressive outlook would enhance our ability to design management systems that safeguard biodiversity or ecosystem functions and yet sustain livelihoods of some people. India's forest and biodiversity badly need these inputs.

**Jagdish Krishnaswamy**

**GREENER PASTURES: Politics, Markets and Community Among a Migrant Pastoral People**  
by Arun Agrawal. Duke University Press, Durham, and Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998.

THE Raikas are a sheep herding community in western Rajasthan who migrate for many months of the year, covering thousands of miles to obtain forage for

their sheep. They migrate in large collectives, each camp having over a hundred individuals, with upto 40 different flocks in the same herd.

Agrawal's masterly study focuses on three broad questions: Why do the Raikas migrate? Why do they migrate collectively? And what are the means by which they deal with the problems that are inherent to collective action? Yet the book is much more than just a study on pastoralism, for he uses the material on the Raikas to examine a number of larger theoretical concerns.

As do other pastoralists in arid and semi-arid parts of the world, the Raikas migrate in order to track the inter-annual variations in rainfall that characterise many parts of western India. Such variation leads to extreme unpredictability with regard to the geographic distribution of forage, forcing the herders to move to meet their animals' requirements. In recent years, Raika migrations have taken them to more distant regions, into Haryana and even the Punjab. On occasion they have remained away from their homes for all 12 months of the year

This last has basically occurred owing to a decrease in available forage in western Rajasthan – a consequence of a number of factors. As lands that have been grazed by shepherds come under cultivation, the shepherds are forced to wander farther and for longer periods. Agrawal argues that politics lie at the root of this decreasing resource base for graziers. A developmental state has preferentially provided cultivators with incentives and resources to expand cultivation, while ignoring the requirements of the pastoralist communities in the region.

Closer to home, high caste villagers within villages inhabited by the Raikas have used environmental conservation as an excuse to close off traditional grazing lands to grazing, thereby forcing the herders to stay away from the village for longer periods of time. This enforced absence from the village effectively marginalises the Raikas within village politics, thereby diluting their challenge to the high caste domination of the panchayat.

Agrawal's study of village level politics is particularly important in the context of the current interest in better involving local communities in conservation and development projects. While many such calls for democratising resource use are morally unimpeachable, romantic notions of egalitarian communities often obscure a reality of communities as constituted of interested and often antagonistic actors. As demonstrated in the high caste attempt to marginalise the Raikas within village politics, the Patwal 'community' is anything but egalitarian.

In the second section of the book, Agrawal examines the intriguing question of why the Raikas migrate collectively. Through compelling ethnographic and survey data, the author demonstrates significant economies of scale that result from collective migrations. These come during the bulk purchase of medicines, food and supplementary feeds, the higher saleability of the manure from 5000 rather than 500 sheep, which ensures a greater likelihood of the herders gaining access to a farmer's fallow or harvested fields, as well as critical savings in time and energy as a result of decision making by a single, appointed individual, rather than by each of the members of the 40-50 strong collective.

But a collective migration is also essential if the migration is to take place at all. The Raikas are moving through densely settled, and often hostile, environments, with the potential for repeated altercations between herder and cultivator. The presence of 40-50 adult males is generally adequate to prevent excessively high demands made by cultivators on herders as the latter move through village common lands or while their sheep are drinking at sources of water within village boundaries. Politics, once again, lies at the root of the Raika decision to migrate collectively.

In the final section of the book, Agrawal investigates the means by which herders deal with the problems that are a part of any collective activity. The Raikas appoint a person to lead them and appear to grant him a large swathe of financial powers. This leader is chosen based on his knowledge of the area the herders will migrate through, his political connections, his contacts within the farming community, and his status within the Raika community. There is, however, the obvious problem that a leader could skim off substantial profits from the various financial deals he wrangles on behalf of the herders in his camp. How do the herders prevent him from cheating them thus?

The author argues that sanctions form a basic weapon in the herders' armoury in preventing a leader from working against their benefits. They do this in one of two ways – first, a herder may decide to break with the group, an extreme move that would have significant repercussions for the reputation of the leader. Alternatively, the herders will elect a different person to lead them on the following year's migration, once again, a blow to a potential leader's status. Herders have also devised a number of ways by which they can monitor the transactions that the leader undertakes on their behalf. They do this by having a couple of herders accompany the leader to the market when he buys

medicines, or by ensuring that negotiations with cultivators for access to grazing lands are held in the open, at a time when others are also in the vicinity. Thus, the ability to sanction a leader, combined with a regular monitoring of his activities, ensures an efficient functioning of the collective.

These findings are not entirely surprising, but nonetheless provide important support for the idea that development programmes are more likely to work under conditions of greater transparency and if the principal beneficiaries have the power to sanction (vote out of office) those supposed to provide developmental services. Merely paying lip service to the idea of greater local involvement in development is unlikely to ensure an improvement in implementing development programmes. The power to sanction and greater transparency must necessarily be part of any attempt to better involve local communities in development projects.

Countering standard descriptions of pastoralists, shifting cultivators and tribal communities as marginal to the mainstream of society, Agrawal highlights the many ways in which these herders have contested and resisted their own marginalisation. They have stood for elections to the village council in an attempt to reduce the hegemonic hold of the upper caste villagers on the council. They have approached senior ministers within the Rajasthan government to secure greater developmental assistance. And even as developmental programmes have resulted in a reduction in grazing lands available to the Raikas, they have found new spaces within which to graze their animals, through extended migrations, by bribing their way past forest department guards, or through their exploitation of fresh sources of grazing material such as crop residues that have accompanied the intensification of cultivation. In each of these moves can be seen the willingness of the herders to contest any form of marginality that is imposed upon them by a state and society with stereotypical images of a primitive people, the Raikas, 'clenched fist in the face of history,' to use Agrawal's evocative phrase.

The author brings a great range of analytical tools to the many themes and ideas in this book – I have provided only a sampling of the issues he deals with. In less talented hands, the diversity of issues addressed here may well have appeared forced. Agrawal's analytical clarity provides the glue that holds this book together, particularly his uncompromising effort to simplify rather than obfuscate these much discussed issues. Reading him is like a breath of fresh air mov-



ing through the stale and often hackneyed rhetoric that characterises much writing on community and markets

**Vasant K. Saberwal**

**THE CITIZEN'S FIFTH REPORT: State of India's Environment Series, Part I and II** edited by Anil Agrawal, Sunita Narain and Srabani Sen. Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi, 1999.

THE First Citizen's Report in 1982 by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) in many ways considerably helped sharpen the debate on the environment in India. The report offered one of the earliest critiques of 'development' from an ecological standpoint, based essentially on a pro-people slant that was radically distinct from the then predominantly elite perceptions on conservation and preservation. The second report (1984) adopted the same broad format and focused on exposing environmentally degrading activities, especially their impact on the lowest rungs of society.

In the third report (1991), however, the CSE reorganized its format and structured the entire volume around investigating a single issue—flood control. This thematic approach carried over into the fourth (1997) report, devoted to highlighting the need for restoring traditional irrigation systems in the Indian subcontinent. The third and fourth reports were different on another count as well. Besides being elegantly produced, they were based primarily on original research carried out by the CSE. Clearly the CSE's State of the Environment (SOE) reports represent an evolving perspective, indicative as much of political trends on environmental concerns as a careful and methodical documentation of ecological degradation and unsustainable development initiatives.

The fifth report has once again been invested with a new approach. Published in two volumes, the first part is a comprehensive evaluation of the status of India's ecological infrastructure such as land, water, and atmosphere; the second part provides a valuable and carefully enumerated statistical data base on different aspects of India's environment and economy. In both volumes the facts and figures are meticulously collated and the arguments credibly substantiated. The CSE is truly a professional outfit and the report will serve as a valuable source book to innumerable NGOs and government departments.

The CSE's overall assessment of India's environment is unfortunately alarming. The majority of the rivers and fresh water sources are polluted with toxic industrial waste and urban effluents. Existing river supplies are, moreover, heavily overdrawn by irrigation projects and many of these grossly dwindled channels are infused with sewage, pesticide residues, drain water, etc. The Yamuna that skirts Delhi is a poignant example of an entire river regime despoiled by the city's foul waste discharges. The rate of deforestation remains critical. Though somewhat arrested, natural forests still declined from 55.12 million hectares in 1980 to 51.73 mha in 1999. Untouched forests or pristine forests could be as low as 11.66 mha, i.e. approximating just 3.5% of the country's land area.

Air quality in cities and towns has witnessed an unprecedented decline. Most big cities are now lethal gas chambers. While Delhi, Calcutta, Mumbai and Chennai all have suspended particulate matter (SPM) levels way above WHO norms, a whole new set of urban settlements are being added to the list. In Hyderabad, for example, the pollution level between 1993-96 has gone up by 170 tonnes. Even Dehra Dun, for long a haven and natural retreat, is now a polluted urban sprawl. The evidence on health, industrial pollution, habitat, etc. is similarly depressing. The limitations of writing a review, however, prevents one from elaborating in colourful detail the grave situation in these sectors.

Even more disconcerting than the pathology of environmental degradation is the repeated failure of all institutional arrangements to check the speedy depletion of these vital resources. Whether it is air pollution monitoring boards, river action plan authorities, or forest bureaucracies—there is a palpable lack of political will to make the writ of any of these agencies effective. In fact, if anything, government initiatives when lacking in popular participation run a reverse course by aggravating situations and severely compromising peoples' access to their natural environment and resource base.

While the CSE report can be considered substantial and far reaching in terms of documenting the status of the environment and institutional failures, it remains either bizarrely naive or categorically rightwing in terms of advancing a political perspective on the nature of the crisis. To start with, the report operates within an oversimplified political framework for explaining the inexorable destruction of India's ecological infrastructure. At the top of the list of belligerents, according to the CSE, sits the government

and its bureaucracy. Accordingly, government initiatives are corroded and demonized by corruption and inevitably the poor powerless masses bear the brunt and make up the suffering rear. The 'agents of change', in the perception of the CSE, are the law courts, which must be/can be used to limit or put an end to corruption.

In sum, it is a middle class moral-posturing view of politics with the emancipatory agenda located outside of politics and firmly limited to the judicial process. Undoubtedly, one does not expect a full blown and complex analysis of the Indian state with a precise assessment of the correlation of class forces in a CSE report. Nevertheless, one does develop an unease of sorts with an over-simplified model.

Can one really confront India's environmental crisis without a direct assault on skewed relations of class and property? Is increasing productivity through sustainable environmental practices possible with the current complexion of ruling interests, especially given the speed with which liberalisation and privatisation of the economy is occurring. Is it possible to empower people merely through eco-friendly techniques and practices? Surely the CSE with its experience in docu-

menting environmental issues since 1982 has the maturity now to at least begin to evolve a more complex understanding of the larger political economy that underdevelops regions and degrades environments.

Corruption in India is structural rather than individual. It is only one among the many means and methods with which our ruling classes prosper at the cost of the environment and people in general. Not to squarely identify the nature of class rule and reduce prescriptions to issues of administrative detail and technique compromises the strength of the report and its rich documentation. The fifth report will undoubtedly reach out to a large number of concerned activists and motivated individuals and, therefore, makes the need for a political perspective critical. One could not help but notice that the fifth report had another innovation to its credit; while the first report was dedicated to the women of Chamoli and the second to the people displaced by large dams, the most recent one carries advertisements by HUDCO, Indian Oil Corporation, Hero Honda, to name a few. Is there a clear message here?

**Rohan D'Souza**

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# Communication

Narayana Murthy, the CEO of Infosys Technologies, has no doubt become an icon of India's advancement in information technology. His humble middle class background and his continued stay in a middle class locality in Bangalore have received justifiable media attention for the last two years. But, what really surprised me was his criticism of the reservation system. In his interview in the January issue of *Seminar* he says, 'It was not easy for people like us from a certain section of society that was considered already advantaged to get a job in Karnataka because of the reservation system and so I postponed the career decision for two years by doing my masters.'

This is a typical argument that a section of society has used against reservation. The fact that he could do his masters despite reservation at the post-graduate level shows that reservation does not come in the way of talented people. Reservation has not harmed the interests of some sections of society, as the percentage of government jobs in the employment market is negligible.

The hard reality in India today is that despite policies of social justice, caste and class are almost the same. The representation of higher castes goes on increasing from the level of a lower division clerk to the top level of a senior secretary in the central secretariat. Though reservation has benefited a few, even a semblance of social justice remains unattained. At a time when the government is cutting its staff and transferring many of its responsibilities to the private sector, it is important to provide jobs to all sections of society in the private sector. If private industry ignores the backward communities, industrial advancement will lead to greater disparities in the society.

It is in this context that I view Narayana Murthy's statement with great concern. Providing equal opportunities may have remained an ideal but, as a civilised society, it should be our responsibility to work toward that goal. Those who oppose reservation

are surprisingly supporting the selling of postgraduate seats in universities, under what is euphemistically called a 'self-finance scheme'. Those who do not get seats under normal quota can simply buy them. I wonder what values these universities could teach their students.

Industrialists in India have always attacked the supposedly socialist policy of social justice claiming that the government wanted to distribute wealth even before creating it. The basic premise of this argument is that only industries create wealth. This is a tall claim. It should be stressed that the wealth that exists in the form of human and material resources has to be harnessed to the benefit of everyone. Opportunities should be created in such a way that everyone is allowed to put the best of his abilities to create wealth. It is a pity if people have to pin their hopes on compassion shown to them by industry. A pet phrase of these industrialists is 'survival of the fittest'. It is a law of the jungle. Such a policy in a country of great inequalities will only lead to a revival of the barbarism of the medieval period hidden in the agenda of free market theorists.

Another thing that struck me in the interview was the emphasis on teamwork in an organisation. Some years back I was a referee in a high school football match. When one of the teams lost the match I told them it was suicidal to include a polio-afflicted boy in the team. The boys said, 'We are not really unhappy because we have lost the match. We wanted Suresh (the polio-afflicted boy) to play with us. It has given him the self-confidence he needed. We don't need anything more.' I was speechless. I had never seen such a team. I want to see such kind of teams everywhere, teams that not only aim at profits, but also at human values.

**D.S. Poornananda**  
Mangalore

# Backpage

THE relative blackout of the NBA agitation against the hydel dam project at Maheshwar, despite the presence of personalities like Arundhati Roy, seems to mark the end of media fascination with what has been arguably independent India's most commented upon social-ecological movement. And there are many who will heave a sigh of relief – not just farmer's groupings led by Sharad Joshi and Mahendra Singh Tikait who, on the previous occasion of the Rally for the Valley had threatened a counter-mobilisation, or the Gujarat government which has continually branded the NBA as anti-Gujarat, but surprisingly even forums like the *Dalit Voice* whose vituperative writings on the NBA and its best known icon, Medha Patkar, verge on calumny.

Nevertheless, consigning the agitation and all that it has stood for to the dustbins of history (now that we have entered a new millennium) would be a grave error. The current excitement with economic growth at all cost, with its concomitant reliance on electric power and water and scant consideration for the politics and ethics of resource use, represents an ostrich like attitude to the growing conflicts over the use and control of natural resources, including renewable natural resources.

Not too far back, we witnessed a shameful capitulation by the state, both regional and national, over the Cogentrix power project in Karnataka. While commentators, probably correctly, pointed out the anomalies in a fast track project being stalled in our courts for seven years, they conveniently side-stepped the equally legitimate concerns about environmental destruction and displacement. The guarantees conceded to the corporation regarding the rates at which power would be purchased by the state only confirms that our decision makers hold both the people and the fiscal health of the economy in low regard.

The script in such situations is depressingly familiar. As with the Enron Corporation in Maharashtra earlier, or the U.P. State Electricity Board now, the effort is *first* to demonstrate that there is a severe shortage of power. Rather than work towards reducing transmission leakages or ensure proper power billing and collection of dues, the public entities responsible are permitted to fall sick. A curious silence is maintained over the fact that as much as the corruption in these entities the political announcement of subsidies is equally responsible for the financial mess.

With the stage having been set for generation of additional power capacity, preferably through mega

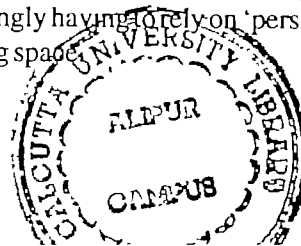
projects, the next round involves legitimising the participation of private capital, both national and foreign. Like the Enron and Cogentrix projects, the dam at Maheshwar too involves substantial private capital. The objection of protesting movements is not to the generation of additional power capacity or the invitation extended to private capital, but the overall process which remains shrouded in secrecy and disregards legitimate questions, most often by branding all protest as anti-development, anti-progress and anti-people.

Projects like the one at Maheshwar are invariably justified in terms of both water (irrigation, drinking water) and power needs of needy populations. In the case of the dams on the Narmada, the imagery of a drought stricken Gujarat and western Madhya Pradesh has come very handy. Yet, as has been convincingly demonstrated, micro watershed schemes in both Jhabua and Surendranagar have in a short time managed to substantially alleviate water scarcity for dispersed rural communities, as also regenerated the degraded environment.

Maybe what we need is a slight re-focusing of the environmental movements. A positive campaign about what communities can do to the local environment, with minimal financial resources but technical help and organisational cohesion, could substantially erode one plank on which promoters of mega projects seek and generate public sympathy. Similarly, building on the work of the International Energy Initiative in Bangalore on the Karnataka State Electricity Board and the myriad ways in which greater efficiency in power use can be ensured would blow a big hole in the arguments advanced by the lobbies advocating additional power generation.

Equally, there is no running away from strengthening mechanisms for transparency and accountability and demanding that project authorities and the state share all information regarding large development projects. At least then we can initiate efforts aimed at substantive public debate and discussion, to try and ensure that decisions are based on a rational calculus and subserve public good. Otherwise we are likely to witness the authorities continuing in their technocratic and secretive ways and movements pushed to the wall, increasingly having to rely on 'personalities' to ensure a hearing space.

Harsh Sethi



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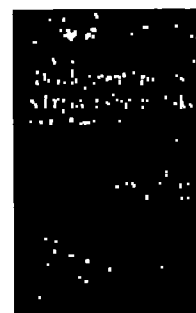
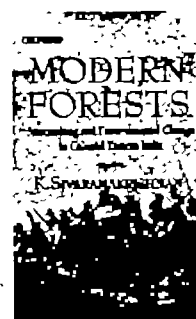
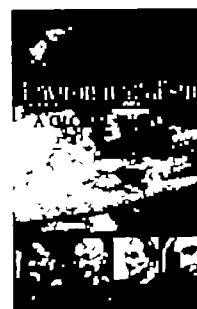
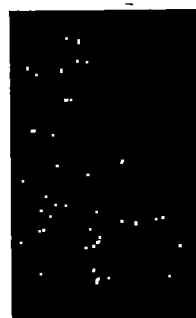
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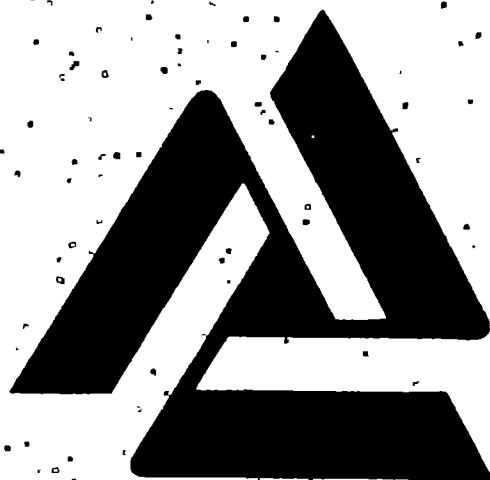
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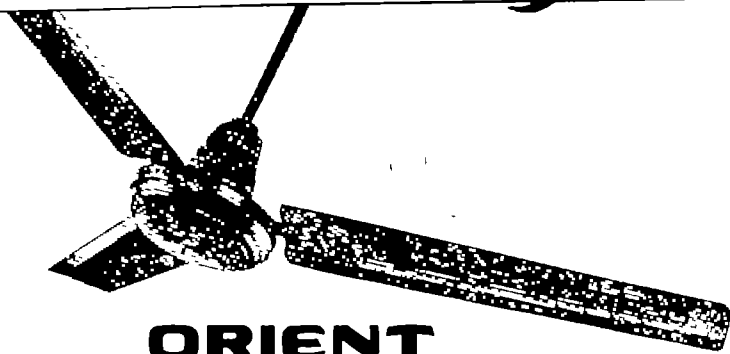
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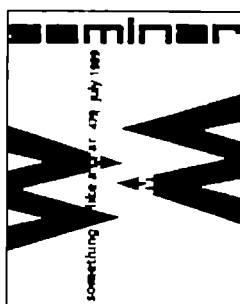
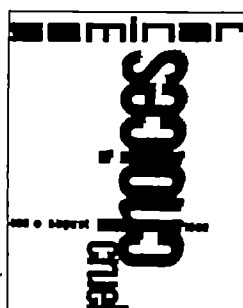
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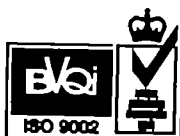
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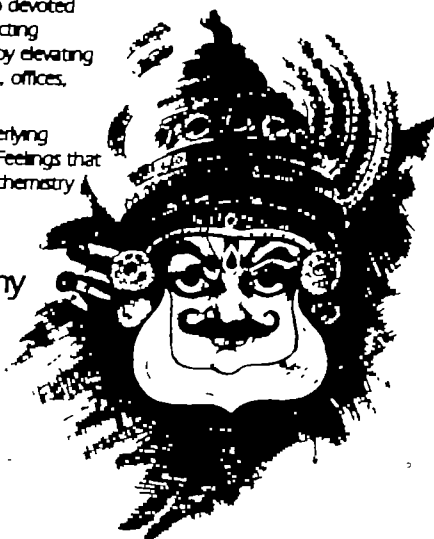
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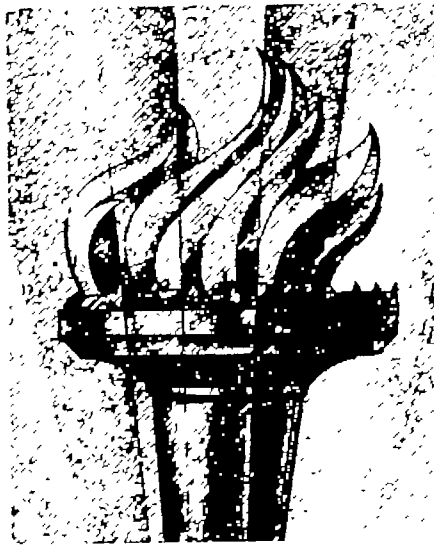
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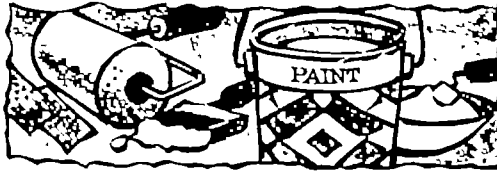
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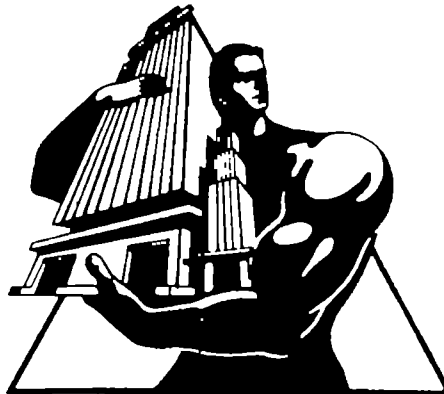
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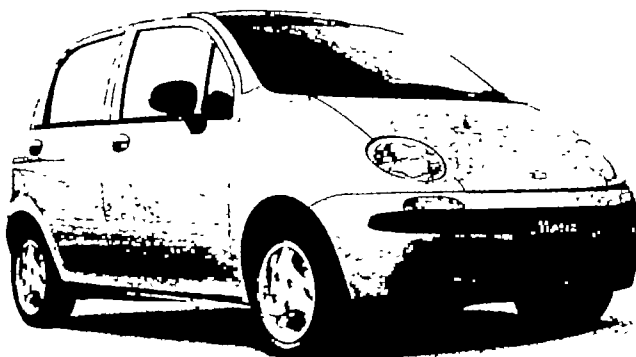
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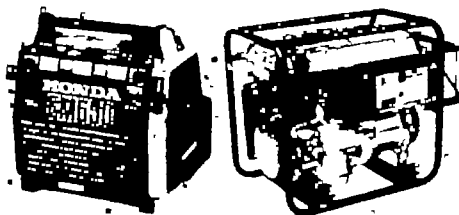
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the need to refocus

our foreign policy

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# The problem

INDIA'S links with Asia to its East are ancient and civilizational. Yet, two centuries of European colonialism and a near half-century of the Cold War have weakened this ancient link. The end of the Cold War, India's own increasing outward economic orientation, and the view that in the emerging multipolar world many Asian powers, particularly China, Japan, Korea and the ASEAN nations, are likely to be important players, has shaped India's renewed eastward journey.

India's cultural and economic links with eastern Asia go a long way. It is well known, for instance, that in Valmiki's Ramayana there are references to places identified as China, Java and Sumatra as likely places of Goddess Sita's concealment. Maritime historians have gathered evidence of Indian interaction with societies spanning the entire Indian Ocean rim well into 1000 BC and earlier.<sup>1</sup> The kingdoms of the Andhra and Orissa coasts were active in promoting maritime contact with the people of Indo-China and the interest shown by the Mauryas and the Andhras encouraged emigration to the Indonesian archipelago and other surrounding islands.<sup>2</sup>

It is believed that around 600 AD, the Saka kings of Gujarat set sail and reached the west coast of Java. According to the distinguished naval historian, Rear

Admiral Sridharan, 'This was the first wave of emigrants from the west coast of India to have settled in Java and contributed in a large measure towards the spread of Indian art and culture.'<sup>3</sup> There is evidence of intimate contacts between the Sailendras, who were the Hindu rulers of Malaya peninsula and the Indonesian archipelago and the Palas of Bengal.

Both Dravidian and Aryan people have had contact with the people of the South East Asian region. Of the many Indian dynasties which made contact with the region, the Kalinga dynasty played the most important role in promoting emigration to the region, particularly to Java and as early as 75 AD. Historians believe this marks the beginning of 'Hindu' influence in the region. As Sridharan notes: 'There is no doubt that from as far back as 75 AD, if not earlier, the Hindus began to make a descent on the Indonesian archipelago and eventually left the imprint of Hindu civilization, Indian art and architecture, Hindu and Buddhist religious customs and manners. The island of Bali shows that even to this day there exist visible signs of Hindu culture and civilization.'<sup>4</sup> Buddhism has had an even greater impact.

It is clear that until the arrival of Arab traders in the Indian Ocean in the second century AD, the Indian merchants held an unchallenged monopoly of overseas

1 K. Sridharan, *A Maritime History of India*. Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1982, chapters 1-2

2 Ibid., pp. 27-28.

3 Ibid., p. 31.

4 Ibid., p. 37.

commerce in the Indian Ocean waters. Sridharan writes that: "The takeover of trade from south Indian merchants by the Arab middlemen apparently came about at the end of the Chola period. So long as the Cholas wielded their naval power, the Arabs do not appear to have ventured to interfere. But the decline of the Chola power and the decadence of the Sri Vijaya empire had created a vacuum in overseas commerce and the Arabs stepped in and in their trade rivalry effectively kept the Chinese away from the Indian Ocean. With the passing away of the overseas trade to the Arabs there was little or no direct interest taken by Indians in overseas commerce and they were content to trade with the Arab intermediaries and agents who sailed with their wares between the East and the West.'

This, however, did not weaken the enduring civilizational influences and for centuries India and the countries of ASEAN have retained a strong cultural bond. The well known Indonesian scholar O. Abdul Rachman notes, for instance: 'From their birthplaces in India, the great religions of Hinduism and Buddhism found their way to Indonesia, where they mingled with the indigenous belief systems to become an enduring and integral component of Indonesian culture. Islam also arrived in Indonesia by way of the Indian subcontinent. During their long process of consolidation, adaptation and growth in Indonesia, these great religions came to be seen by comparing, for example, any of a wide range of religio-cultural expressions and

artifacts – such as temples, shrines, ceremonies, and classic literature such as the Mahabharata and Ramayana – in their respective Indian and Indonesian contemporary manifestations.'<sup>5</sup>

Another Indonesian scholar, Soedjati Djiwandono, quotes President Sukarno as saying: 'In the veins of every one of my people flows the blood of the Indian ancestors and the culture we possess is steeped through and through with Indian influences. Two thousand years ago, people from your country came to Jawadvipa and Suvarnavipa in the spirit of brotherly love. They gave the initiative to found powerful kingdoms such as those of Sri Vijaya, Mataram and Majapahit. We then learned to worship the very Gods that you now worship still and we fashioned a culture that even today is largely identical with your own. Later, we turned to Islam, but that religion too was brought to us by people coming from both sides of the Indus.'<sup>6</sup>

In his masterly and majestic survey of world history, the eminent historian Fernand Braudel refers to India and East Asia as the 'greatest of all the world

5. O. Abdul Rachman, *India and Indonesia in a Changing World*. Paper presented to the First India-Indonesia seminar, New Delhi, April 1976 (mimeo).

6. Quoted in S. Djiwandono, *India's Relations with East Asia New Partners?* Paper presented at the IISS conference on Rethinking India's Role in the World, Neemrana Fort, India, September 1997 (mimeo).

economies' of the pre-industrial, pre-capitalist era. Braudel talks of the 'Far East' as comprising 'three gigantic world-economies': 'Islam, overlooking the Indian Ocean from the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, and controlling the endless chain of deserts stretching across Asia from Arabia to China; India, whose influence extended throughout the Indian Ocean, both east and west of Cape Comorin; and China, at once a great territorial power – striking deep into the heart of Asia – and a maritime force, controlling the seas and countries bordering the Pacific. And so it had been for many hundreds of years.'<sup>7</sup>

'The relationship between these huge areas,' says Braudel, 'was the result of a series of pendulum movements of greater or lesser strength, either side of the centrally positioned Indian subcontinent. The swing might benefit first the East and then the West, redistributing functions, power and political or economic advance. Through all these vicissitudes however, India maintained her central position: her merchants in Gujarat and on the Malabar and Coromandel coasts prevailed for centuries on end against their many competitors – the Arab traders of the Red Sea, the Persian merchants of the Gulf, or the Chinese merchants familiar with the Indonesian seas to which their junks were now regular visitors.'<sup>8</sup>

Discussing the place of the 'East Indies' in this 'Asian super world economy', Braudel adds: 'The logical confluence of trade, the crossroads lying at the centre of this super world economy could hardly be elsewhere than in the East Indies. Geography placed this region on the edge of Asia, halfway between China and Japan on the one hand, and India and the countries of the Indian Ocean on the other. But if geography proposes, history disposes, and in this instance refusal or acceptance could take innumerable forms depending on the actions of the superpowers of the Far East: China and India. At times when both were prosperous, in control of themselves and simultaneously engaged in outside activities, the centre of gravity of the Far East was quite likely to lie, and to remain for a longer or shorter period, somewhere near the Malacca peninsula and the islands of Java and Sumatra. But the sleeping giants were both slow to arouse and invariably slow to act.'<sup>9</sup>

Indian and Chinese traders made the islands of the East Indies a 'busy crossroads of trade' for several

centuries, and created, what Braudel calls, the 'super world economy' of the Far East that had attained levels of economic and social development exceeding those of Europe at the time. European expansion into the Indian Ocean region and colonialism altered the nature and course of India's relations with Southeast Asia. As historian K.M. Panikkar notes, the victory of the Portuguese along the western coast of India in early 16th century 'laid the firm foundations of the European mastery of the Eastern seas which continued for over 400 years.'<sup>10</sup> Beginning with the Portuguese, followed by the Dutch and then by the British and French, the maritime links between India and the Southeast Asian nations was almost completely dominated by Europeans and India's independent links with the region revived only after her Independence and the decline of colonial power in the region.

The leadership of independent India, especially the first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, brought India's relations with the rest of Asia, in particular East Asia, to the centre stage of India's relations with the world immediately after India attained independence from British colonial rule. However, the Cold War and India's insularity, on the one hand, and its western orientation, on the other, did not allow this process to move forward at the required pace. It was then left to the first head of a government in Delhi hailing from peninsular India, and indeed from very close to the Coromandel coast, Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, to rediscover the value to India of its links with the East. It was Prime Minister Rao who first urged India to 'Look East' and himself chose to attach great importance to his diplomatic forays into South Korea, Singapore and other ASEAN nations.

There is no doubt that in relating to our Asian neighbours both cultural and economic factors play a role. In Thailand, for example, senior Thai officials and diplomats openly refer to 'Buddhist diplomacy' and 'Buddhist tourism' as important factors in their relations with India. However, in rediscovering Asia to its East, India has given a primacy of place to economic relations.

Indian economists and businessmen have for some time been profoundly impressed and influenced by the 'miracle economies' of Asia. Indeed, no other global phenomenon has had a greater impact on the thinking of India's economists and economic policy makers in recent times than eastern Asia's rapid economic take off. The two external factors which played

10. K.M. Panikkar, *India and the Indian Ocean*. George, Allen and Unwin, London.

7. Fernand Braudel, *Civilisation and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century*. Volume 3: *The Perspective of the World*. Collins/Pontana Press, 1984, chapter 5, pp. 484-535.

8. Ibid., p. 484.

9. Ibid., p. 523.

a decisive role in shaping the shift in Indian economic policy in the 1990s were the end of the Cold War and India's need to redefine its relationship with the world's major powers, especially the United States, giving primacy to economic relations; and, the remarkable economic growth performance of Asia to the 'east' of India. The economic crisis in eastern Asia in 1997-98 has not taken the shine off the image of this region as being the engine of growth in Asia.

When 'city states' and smaller nations like Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Korea began to outperform other developing economies in the 1960s and 1970s, India did not take much notice of this experience assuming that the dynamics of small economies, especially those which were trade-dependent and benefited from a benign relationship with the OECD economies, were quite different from those of a 'continental' economy like hers. This complacent view was rudely shaken by China's growth performance, particularly in the framework of a more open, trade-oriented and liberalized economy in the 1980s. When the world began to predict the dawn of an 'Asia-Pacific' century and East and Southeast Asia were beginning to be regarded as the 'new engines' of global economic growth, India could hardly afford to ignore the lessons of East and Southeast Asia's 'outward orientation'. Not surprisingly, while Prime Minister Indira Gandhi refused to listen to the policy advice of Singapore's President Lee Kuan Yew in the 1970s, in 1992 Prime Minister Narasimha Rao came to Singapore to Look East and learn from Asia.

The Asian miracle held another message for India. If India continued to remain trapped in a moderate growth syndrome, China would emerge as Asia's undisputed leader. Thus, the urge to step up economic growth through increased trade and foreign investment, the need to 'engage' the faster growing economies of the world, particularly Asia, the need to deepen and broaden its relationship with the United States, European Union and eastern Asia in the post-Cold War context and a desire to improve relations with its own neighbours through increased economic interaction drove India's economic liberalization programmes in the 1990s.

When Prime Minister Rao urged India to Look East he was not merely interested in enhancing Indian exports to the region. His interest, as indeed that of successive governments even if not pursued with equal vigour, was in forging a closer relationship with the region as a whole across the entire spectrum of trade, investment, cultural, political, diplomatic

and strategic ties. Thus, apart from increased trade and investment there has also been an interest in cooperation in other spheres, science and technology, space and communications, maritime economy and security.

In the early and mid 1990s when regional economic cooperation and the creation of regional economic groups (REGs) was in vogue and India was nervous about being left out of all the regional groups being put together in Asia, India pursued membership of ASEAN even as it forced the pace of SAARC's evolution from a political group to a regional economic group. India met with limited success on both fronts. In the case of ASEAN, it secured a 'dialogue partner' status and was subsequently invited to join the Asean Regional Forum (ARF). However, it failed to secure membership of APEC and did not succeed in widening the scope of the Asia-Europe conclave (ASEM) to secure its inclusion. However, India has become a full member of the Asean Regional Forum (ARF), a political forum, and hopes to be more active in regional security dialogues.

There are two dimensions to India's new relationship with ASEAN. First, the trade and investment dimension (which is documented in subsequent sections of this paper); second, the foreign policy and strategic dimension. Neither of these relations has equal value to all ASEAN countries. Clearly, India's economic relations with some are more developed than with others. Similarly with India's political and strategic relations. Suffice it to say that in no case is the relationship purely unidimensional.

The economic relationship is stronger with countries like Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand – which have emerged as important trading and investment partners for India. Singapore is in many ways the hub of the India-ASEAN relationship and played a key role in ASEAN's decision to designate India as a 'full dialogue partner'. Singapore has major investment plans for Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. There are now direct flights from Singapore to Chennai, Bangalore and Hyderabad, apart from Delhi, Mumbai and Calcutta. Malaysia is expected to invest in road and port development in Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. Thailand's relations with India have been further strengthened with the creation of another regional economic grouping, the Bangladesh India Myanmar Sri Lanka Thailand Economic Cooperation group, BIMSTEC.

On the political side, India has traditionally had good relations with Vietnam and now this relationship has been deepened with increased Indian invest-

ment in Vietnam and a growing two-way trade. India's defence relationship with Indonesia and Malaysia has also been an important dimension of her relations with this region. This aspect of India-ASEAN relations has acquired higher profile with the emergence of China as a new global 'superpower' and an Asian economic giant

China looms large over the region and in the new 'balance of power' which all ASEAN member countries are trying to help shape, India, Japan and the United States will be increasingly viewed as checks and balances against growing Chinese economic and military power in the region. All ASEAN member countries are committed to developing friendly and profitable relations with China, and are equally committed to good relations with other major powers in the region, including India. The Indonesian strategic policy thinker, Djiwandono notes, for example: 'China and India, despite bilateral problems, are now both ASEAN dialogue partners and participants of ARF. Indeed, in terms of power politics, the engagement of the two largest nations in the world, along with the US, Japan and Russia, might help create a regional balance of power in East Asia and the Asia-Pacific region as part of the global balance that includes the European Union'<sup>11</sup>

Djiwandono goes on to add: 'In fact, with the establishment of ARF, ASEAN strives to engage and bring the major powers into a regional structure. In that way they may play their proper roles commensurate with their respective potential capabilities so as to maintain regional peace, security and stability.' Thus, the comprehensive scope of India-ASEAN relations should not be lost sight of in any evaluation of purely economic benefits and costs. The India-ASEAN dialogue and relationship is wide ranging and will be long enduring. It is as much interested in building an economic relationship as in improving political and social understanding.

The slow progress of regional cooperation within South Asia, particularly the inability of SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) to widen economic links within the subcontinent, largely on account of Pakistani intransigence and unwillingness to play by the global rules of the game in trade and partly on account of India's slow pace of trade liberalization, has also forced India to Look East for more trade opportunities. While SAARC has progressed from SAPTA I to SAPTA II, creating and widening a

preferential trade agreement (PTA), and has placed the creation of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) on its agenda, the progress on SAFTA has also been slowed down by Pakistani non-cooperation.

Given the slow pace of trade liberalization within SAARC, India has opted for speedier bilateral trade agreements with Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Simultaneously, India has also supported the creation of new REGs like the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IORARC) and the Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). Regional growth triangles (quadrangles), partly inspired by the example of the Singapore-Malaysia-Thailand triangle, are being tried and if one of these experiments, the BBNI (Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal and India quadrangle) succeeds, long term solutions for the development of India's backward northeastern region can be found.

India's commitment to some of these REGs may increase if the current standoff between India and Pakistan on the Kargil conflict further slows down the momentum of economic cooperation within South Asia. SAARC has become hostage to the swings in India-Pakistan bilateral relationship and other SAARC members – Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh – have become testy about its slow progress. The lukewarm response of leaders to the report of the SAARC Eminent Persons' Group (1998), which has advocated the creation of a South Asian Customs Union by 2015 and a SA Economic Union (SAEU) by 2020, suggests that SAARC may not emerge as an important REG for India in the near future.

Given this impasse in SAARC, India may well end up investing more energy in its bilateral relationship with other SAARC members and, at the same time, help create and sustain new forums in which the agenda of trade liberalization can be pursued. The most promising such forum is BIMSTEC. Its membership includes key SAARC countries as well as two ASEAN members closest to India in geographical terms – Myanmar and Thailand. BIMSTEC is an odd name for an REG. Indeed, there is no REG anywhere in the world which is named on the basis of the first letter of the name of each of its member countries. This is an untidy formula which has forced BIMSTEC to change its name at least once, from BISTEC, when Myanmar joined it.

The defining feature of BIMSTEC is that its members are the rim economies of the Bay of Bengal. If BIMSTEC is in fact viewed as a Bay of Bengal Community (BOBCOM), there is good reason to include

11. Djiwandono, op. cit., p. 43



the two landlocked countries in South Asia which are completely dependent on the Bay of Bengal for their national economic needs – Nepal and Bhutan. In this case, BIMSTEC or BOBCOM becomes SAARC *minus* Pakistan *plus* Myanmar and Thailand. India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand should come closer and create the Bay of Bengal community to facilitate speedier trade liberalization and increased intra-regional capital flows within such a community. The landlocked states of Nepal and Bhutan, directly dependent on this sea, may also be invited to join. If China's southwestern provinces and Malaysia find it useful they too may establish special links with such a group.

It is easy to see why a Bay of Bengal community (BOBCOM) may end up being a far more dynamic group. BOBCOM's ASEAN component, especially Thailand, can help speed up the pace of trade liberalization and regional economic cooperation within South Asia at a pace faster than what SAARC has been capable of. In the interest of imparting greater dynamism to such a regional economic group, and in recognition of the fact that it is the largest hub port serving the entire Bay of Bengal, Singapore should be invited to join the Bay of Bengal community.

It is also becoming increasingly clear that the only regional economic links that India can meaningfully forge in the near future, even within South Asia, will be those to her East – the Bay of Bengal rim, the Himalayan region and eastwards. As long as Pakistan remains a 'rogue' state in the region, sponsoring terrorism and unwilling to restore normal trade relations within the WTO framework, not only will SAARC, SAFTA and SAEU remain hobbled, but even the prospects of regional economic links with Central and West Asia will remain tenuous and limited. Against this background, a regional economic group based around the Bay of Bengal and linking India, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh more closely to the ASEAN economies offers the prospect of widening the network for outward oriented growth in this part of Asia.

Barely a decade ago the 21st century was regarded as the Asia-Pacific century. Such hubris has been missing since the economic crisis in eastern Asia. However, it is now clear that eastern Asia will remain an important engine of growth well into the current century and that the varying dynamic of growth will alter the balance of power, both within the region and globally.

If the next phase of India's outward orientation has to proceed apace, it is important that India's trade

with the APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Community) economies must increase, and that India must in fact become a member. To enable this, the Look East policy must firmly focus on Singapore, Thailand and Korea. India must also rebuild its links with Myanmar with whom economic and political relations have been neglected for far too long. There is potential for the development of India's North East through greater cooperation with Myanmar, Thailand and Singapore.

So far we have only explained India's Look East policy. The question remains as to why Asia to our east must desire to look West to India. There is no easy answer to this question. An obvious reason is economic. India's liberal trade and investment policy of the 1990s has opened up the Indian economy and the newly industrializing Asian economies can benefit from this. That is clear. There are strategic factors as well. The end of the Cold War and the emergence of China as a major power have alerted a range of countries in Asia, including Japan, Korea, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand to consider closer relations with India. What motivates each of these nations is quite different. In Thailand there is a conscious Look West policy of being more actively engaged with South Asia. In Korea there is a realisation that Japan may have been too slow in responding to market opportunities in India and that Korean brand names have come to stay here and so must be invested in further. Almost all these countries would like to see a balance of power in Asia in which the United States, China and Japan do not increase their power at the expense of the other. In this context, the emergence of a more economically dynamic and strategically secure India can be a positive factor.

For India, therefore, there is once again an opportunity to relate to Asia to its east. However, so far our diplomacy has been desultory, at best sporadic and episodic. Greater consistency, greater commitment to more open trade and investment relations and a willingness to share in the region's problems and not just in its prosperity will help India move closer. Eastern Asia beckons India once again as we enter a new millennium. While India must Look East with purpose and commitment, the Asia-Pacific community must also accept the fact that its links with this sub-continent, particularly peninsular India, run deep into the foundation of our combined history. In Asia, India is both a factor for peace and stability as well as a partner in progress.

SANJAYA BARU

# The Asian balance of power

C RAJA MOHAN

ANY talk of a 'balance of power' usually raises howls of protest from many in India. The dismissal of the concept as reflecting outmoded thinking is fairly common in Indian political discourse. But as it strives to develop a new foreign policy after the Cold War, India is increasingly being forced to come to terms with the idea of balance of power.

The end of the Cold War in Europe and the ongoing integration of the European economies alongside attempts at greater political integration in the continent have given rise to a view that traditional concepts of security are no longer relevant. There is a powerful perception that the idea of the state and its sovereignty has been made irrelevant by processes that are taking place at both the global and local level.

Traditional security structures have, however, proved to be enduring even in Europe. Witness the persistence of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) as the world's most powerful military instrument. Witness also the clamour all over Central and Eastern Europe to become a part of this successful security umbrella. To be sure, NATO is trying to adapt itself to the new security challenges in the

post Cold War world. But there is no fundamental change in the character of the alliance as an arrangement for collective self-defence among a group of like-minded states.

The traditional nature of the security dynamic in Asia is far more striking. Unlike in Europe, where the processes of integration have begun to chip away at the earlier notions of sovereignty, Asia is seeing the consolidation and rise of powerful nationalisms that are somewhat less amenable to integrative impulses arising from the economic imperative. Further, unlike in Europe there is no broad consensus in Asia that liberal democracy is the only acceptable form of governance.

In Western Europe the prolonged external conflict with the Soviet Union and the internal battle against communism had helped build a successful cooperative security framework under the leadership of the United States. This helped the European states to submerge their individual historic differences and mistrust of neighbours in the pursuit of broader collective interests. There was indeed deviation from the broad pattern even in Western Europe. France has often sought to define its own individual security personality,

out without threatening the core collective strategic premises of the West.

During the Cold War, Asia did not witness a stable pattern of alliances. The dramatic shifts in China's orientation, and to a lesser extent by others, in the last five decades prevented a freezing of the security dynamic in Asia. Without a common enemy and without an agreement on basic ideological premises, Asia has seen more instability in its security structures than Europe. Further, nascent nationalism has also made it difficult to overcome the deep historical animosities in Asia.

**A**nd finally, there is no single civilizational thread, as evident in Europe that can unite a core group of Asian nations to take charge of the broader security framework in the region. The civilizational unity allowed an external power, the United States, to play a domineering role in shaping the balance of power in Europe. But in Asia there is less than universal acceptance of the centrality of the U.S. role in Asian security and considerable scepticism about the depth of American commitment to involvement in Asia.

The extraordinary strength of the collective self-defence arrangements in Europe and the defeat of the sole adversary have facilitated thinking about broader notions of collective security and of transcending the nation state itself. By contrast, in Asia, the idea of collective security has long been seen with suspicion. And the question of looking beyond the state at alternative arrangements remains largely academic at this point of time. Asia was dragged, kicking and screaming, into the earlier era of globalization under a colonial framework. But in the current wave of globalization, Asian nations are no longer mere supplicants to their European

masters. In the last few decades, the economic weight of Asia has significantly expanded. Collectively and individually, the Asian nations are now clamouring for a larger political role in the international political arena.

**B**ut many traditional sources of conflict remain, despite expanding economic integration and the broad range of cooperation among Asian states. The presence of assertive nationalisms, the unfinished agenda of national consolidation, significant territorial disputes, intense mutual distrust based on historical antagonisms, and internal conflicts that could draw in external powers, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, and the presence of failing states—all suggest that the conflict potential is high in Asia.

Given the absence of a framework for collective security, states in the region will rely on such traditional means as expanding national military strength, accretion of strength through alliance relationships and attempts to balance the perceived hegemonic powers. The creation of a stable balance of power in Asia to contain instabilities in the region is essential should the Asian nations want to sustain rising levels of prosperity and expand their position in the international system.

Since the end of the Cold War, Asia is facing up to the reality of an overwhelming U.S. preponderance in the international system. The critical characteristic of the new balance of power in Asia is that the United States strides like a colossus over the rest of the world. The history of international relations in the last three centuries has never seen such a massive imbalance in the global distribution of power. True, there have been earlier periods that saw the preponderance of one power, but never such a huge gap bet-

ween the leading power and possible peer competitors.

All present indicators suggest that the American edge over its possible rivals will remain unchallenged for decades to come. The myth of American decline propagated in the late 1980s has been shattered and the world is witnessing the consequences of unusual unipolarity. In the economic realm, the United States has reorganized itself industrially over the last couple of decades to emerge as the most dynamic among the great powers. For the first time in decades, the United States has a budget surplus and this is expected to continue for many years to come.

**I**n contrast, the myth of Japanese invincibility, which had such a powerful appeal in the 1980s, now stands terribly exposed. Japan is mired in a prolonged recession and is finding it hard to undertake the political and structural changes necessary to pull itself out of it. The European Union is performing better in comparison to Japan but remains way behind the United States. Japan and Western Europe face a new problem—the ageing of their societies—that is expected to create significant problems in the coming years. The U.S. in contrast is in a position to replenish its population with young and educated immigrants from all over the world.

China continues to grow rapidly and the size of its economy will begin to draw closer to that of the United States. But its quality and depth, as well as per capita income, will remain behind the advanced world. Russia, it is evident, will take a long time to get its economic act together, and until then is likely to remain marginal to the power calculus in the region.

More fundamentally, the United States appears to have secured a powerful lead in many of the emerging

areas of technology and industry. There are more computers in use in the United States than in the rest of the world put together. The U.S. domination of the internet is comprehensive. The so called 'digital gap' is visible not just between the United States and the developing world, but it also deeply divides the U.S. and the other great powers.

**O**n the military front, the United States continues to outspend all its potential peers put together. Its lead in nuclear and conventional weaponry remains unsurpassable. More important, in the unfolding revolution in military affairs, the United States is best poised to build and develop a new generation of weapons and adapt its forces to information warfare. Staying close to the United States in these new areas will be a hard task for any of the potential challengers. Washington, however, appears vulnerable to what it calls 'asymmetric warfare' – such unconventional means as terrorism.

In relation to 'soft power', too, all indicators favour the United States. The cultural appeal of the U.S. – the temptations of the 'American way of life', the global reach of Hollywood and American television and the attractions of the American university – remains unrivalled. The U.S. dominance of the world of computers and commerce has helped the English language penetrate even traditionally resistant terrains as the French. As a nation of immigrants, the United States has a concept of citizenship which few nations in Europe or Asia can match. This allows it to draw in the best and brightest from all over the world to contribute to its national gains.

A second feature of the balance of power in Asia is the end of ideological rivalry witnessed during the Cold War. After the collapse of the Soviet

Union and communism there is no grand alternative to the ideas of liberal democracy and free markets long espoused by the United States. Various versions of socialism continue to survive in Asia, but they are on the back foot. Although China, Vietnam and North Korea continue to pay obeisance to the idea of a socialist state, their economic policies are largely oriented towards building capitalism.

Political Islam has made a mark in the Middle East and is beginning to make its presence felt in parts of South and Southeast Asia. But even in the Middle East the march of radical Islam has hit new roadblocks. In the world's most militantly anti western Islamic revolution in Iran, there is a growing popular backlash against the rule of the *mullahs*. The younger generation Iranians are looking towards cultural openness and freedoms that their President, Mohammed Khatami, has promised but is unable to wrest from the mullahs. The endemic economic crisis in West Asia and the failure of any of the variants of Islam to deliver prosperity to the people has shattered the hopes of an Islamic alternative to the West.

**M**eanwhile the vision of an East Asian alternative to the West, too, has received a dramatic setback. At the height of the Asian economic miracle, political confidence in Asia was so high that it could proclaim an Asian model of governance that was significantly different from 'western' liberal democracy. The sense of a 'rising East' dealing with a 'decaying West' became a popular metaphor in Asia at the turn of the 1990s. But the Asian economic crisis of the last few years and the political consequences that followed have renewed questions about both 'Asian values' and the superiority of an Asian model over a western one.

The ideological battleground, if any, in Asia is now within the various nation states on how to come to terms with the ideas of liberal democracy and free markets. With the United States positioning itself as the champion of both, one must expect prolonged debate, if not tension, between the U.S. efforts to promote these ideas and the substantive resistance to either or both these ideas in various Asian nations.

**A** third feature of the Asian balance of power is the relative increase in the power of China. The collapse of the Soviet Union was accompanied by the rapid economic advancement of China. Two decades of economic reform initiated by Deng Xiaoping have created perhaps the largest positive transformation in the lives of the largest number of people in the shortest possible time in history. The impressive economic achievements of China have begun to catapult Beijing to the status of the second most important power in the world. Although many in China have begun to visualize the emergence of a new bipolar world, at least in Asia there clearly are significant limits to Chinese power and far too many internal vulnerabilities to become a rival to the United States.

China is yet to consolidate the full territoriality of its nationhood. While it appears to be successfully managing the integration of Hong Kong and Macao, China is finding it increasingly difficult to handle the Taiwan question. The increasingly assertive postures being adopted by President Lee Tenghui, the rise of democratic aspirations and the sense of a separate nationhood in Taiwan have begun to fundamentally challenge the notion of 'one China'. Meanwhile, Tibet and its spiritual leader the Dalai Lama continue to grab inter-

national attention. At the same time, there is new trouble in Xinjiang which is drawing the attention of militant political Islam. Although China is trying to smother the rise of destabilizing nationalist sentiments in its minority provinces, it may be some distance away from figuring out a viable framework of federalism that could satisfy the political aspirations of its minority nationalities.

Linked to the question of federalism is the broader question of democracy and modern governance inside China. The party-state in China has recognized the importance of political reforms and has even taken a few steps. But it is a long way from resolving the contradiction between the structure of the Communist Party and the imperative of genuine democratic governance. The original promise of the Chinese national movement to deliver democracy remains unfulfilled. At a deeper level, the inability of China to offer an alternative ideology to liberal democracy and free markets limits its ability to emerge as a challenger to the United States. Other than nationalism, China has little to offer to the world in terms of political ideas, and this leaves China on the defensive for the foreseeable future.

**T**he financial clout, technological power, military reach, and the cultural dominance of the United States are being felt in many ways in Asia. On the strategic front, there are visible tendencies towards balancing and bandwagoning with the United States. The renewed demonstration of American power in Kosovo has left many in Russia, China and India with great unease. The expansion of the role of NATO, a lack of concern for the sovereignty of Serbia, and the perceived threats of humanitarian intervention create acute concerns in Asia where nations have significant minority problems.

As a consequence, there is a frantic search for 'multipolarity' and countervailing coalitions and partnerships among the second tier powers.

Even as they seek to balance the United States, explicitly or implicitly, most Asian powers understand the importance of structuring a stable cooperative relationship with the United States. Given the unassailable lead of the United States, the efforts to balance it often end up as mere instruments of either insurance or improvement of bargaining power with the United States.

**T**he United States sees itself as a 'benign' and the first 'non imperialistic' power in the history of the states system. The U.S. has come to believe that it is an 'indispensable' nation in the current constellation of international politics. But even those states that are consistently on its side find it impossible to gain terms of engagement with Washington that are both dignified and leave some space for their own internal evolution, at their own desired pace. The persistent streak of unilateralism in U.S. policy making, the emergence of a post Cold War generation of political class in Washington that is less committed to internationalism in either trade or security, the unpredictability and chaos that surround U.S. decision making – all make it difficult for the Asian nations to deal with the United States. These difficulties are compounded by a realization that there is no alternative to engaging Washington.

After the Cold War, the United States has unveiled a broad framework of its policy, the principal objective of which is to prevent the domination of the mega continent by a single power or a coalition of powers. In the pursuit of this objective, the Clinton administration has strengthened its traditional military alliances in the region,

expanded security cooperation and military access in Southeast Asia, begun a policy of comprehensive engagement with China, probed for an opening with North Korea, and initiated a strategic dialogue with India. Quietly but firmly the United States is rewriting the rules of the political game in the region.

**I**n a major success for U.S. policy, Japan has approved revised guidelines for defence cooperation with the United States that will open the door for a significant expansion of Tokyo's military profile in Asia. The new framework brings the Japanese Self Defence Forces closer to military action in support of U.S. political objectives and allows them to operate outside Japan, marking a profound change in Japan's security policy since the end of the Second World War.

Japan has finally decided to discard the political inhibitions imposed by its disastrous military adventure into Asia six decades ago and move away from the essence of the peace constitution it adopted after its defeat in the Second World War, which severely limited the freedom of its military action. For more than five decades, the military alliance with Japan has been the lynchpin of U.S. strategy in Asia. The new guidelines give Tokyo a wider military role in dealing with future contingencies in Asia and bring Japan closer to becoming a 'normal power', if only under the leadership of the U.S.

If Japan remains the 'northern anchor' of the U.S. military presence in Asia, Australia has emerged as the 'southern anchor'. As part of an agreement in 1996, Australia expanded its military commitments under an alliance with the U.S. In combined military exercises, some of the largest conducted in Australia since the end of the World War II, Washington and

Canberra have covered the full range of operational and tactical cooperation – from full scale joint/combined activities to unit level tactics involving all branches of the services of the two countries. Besides significant bilateral military exercises, the U.S. Navy conducts numerous port calls annually in Australia. In 1997 alone, according to official U.S. sources, the U.S. Seventh Fleet made 102 port calls to Australia. The two sides are also exploring increased combined training, particularly in the Australian Northern Territory.

Within years of being forced out of the Subic Bay – one of the largest U.S. naval bases abroad – by the Philippines in the early 1990s, the U.S. has devised new mechanisms to ensure a steady military presence in Southeast Asia. Apprehensive about the rising power of China and its muscle flexing in the South China Sea, most South-east Asian nations have negotiated military and naval access arrangements with the U.S.

**T**he Philippines found the Chinese nibbling away at its territorial claims in the South China Sea. Locked in an active dispute with China over the Spratly Islands, the Philippines has negotiated a Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) with the U.S. that will expand military cooperation between Manila and Washington. Thailand has a long-standing military alliance with the U.S., under which it has provided Washington with maintenance of war reserves, access facilities, refuelling and transit arrangements that ensure U.S. ability to operate militarily in the region. Thailand also conducts the largest joint military exercises with the U.S. in Southeast Asia.

Elsewhere in the region, Brunei has a limited but active military cooperation with the U.S. in the form of periodic exercises in the nation's jun-

gle warfare training facility, ship and personnel visits, and aircraft transits. Malaysia supports a continued U.S. presence in Asia and makes available naval and air maintenance and repair facilities. There has been a steady increase in U.S. ship visits and exercises in the country. The U.S. is also engaged in low key military diplomacy with Vietnam, a country that fought a long and bitter war with it until 1975.

**S**ingapore has been an active proponent of continued U.S. military presence in Asia to ensure a regional balance of power. Since the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the Subic Bay, Singapore has worked actively to facilitate the dispersal of U.S. forces and spread the political responsibility of hosting the American military presence. It has now offered the U.S. access to its long planned new pier facility at Changi that can accommodate a U.S. aircraft carrier.

China has opposed the expansion of U.S. military alliances in Asia, in particular the new U.S.-Japan defence guidelines. China is particularly concerned about the rise of the Japanese military profile, and is worried that the new defence guidelines bring its 'renegade province' Taiwan into the rubric of the U.S.-Japan security umbrella. China also opposes continuing American military cooperation with Taiwan.

China, however, has long given up its aggressive campaign to oust American military presence in the region. While being wary of the large U.S. military forces deployed in Asia, Beijing continues to believe that they may help prevent the emergence of an independent Japanese military role in the region. China also believes that it has common strategic interests with the U.S. and that it will be able to expand its own strategic partnership

with that country. As a consequence, China is involved in expansive defence exchanges with the U.S., including high level consultations at the political and official level as well as port calls.

Therein lies a clue to the continuing primacy of the U.S. in Asia. Intense nationalism in Asia and memories of past regional conflicts have meant that most Asian states may have good reason to distrust the political intentions of their neighbours more than those of the U.S. Most Asians prefer the U.S. as a distant power to maintain peace in Asia to the domination of the region by one of their own neighbours. Like in Europe, the U.S. will continue to be welcome as the principal arbiter of the balance of power in Asia for a long time to come.

**T**he relations between the United States and China have emerged as the most important determinant of the Asian security scenario in the coming years. After considerable uncertainties of the post Tiananmen phase in the relations between the two nations, Washington and Beijing appeared to settle down to a stable relationship during 1997-98, when President Jiang Zemin visited the United States and President Clinton travelled to Beijing. The two nations proclaimed a 'strategic partnership' and unveiled a broad agenda for cooperation on security issues in the Asia Pacific region.

The proclamation of a strategic partnership generated considerable unease in Asia. There was concern throughout Asia that China had emerged as the principal interlocutor of the United States in the region. The apparent 'China First' policy raised concerns about 'Japan passing' in Tokyo. Much of the region did not want to see a new Cold War in Asia between Washington and Beijing. They called on the United States to

constructively engage China. But the new bonhomie between Presidents Clinton and Jiang raised the spectre of Sino-U.S. condominium in Asia. If there is anything Asia fears more than a new Cold War it is a shared dominance of the region by Washington and Beijing.

A bolt from the blue often destroys years of diplomatic labour spent in crafting a relationship between two nations. The U.S. bombing of the Chinese mission in Belgrade is one such. When Chinese students started throwing stones at the U.S. embassy in Beijing in May to vent their anger at the death of their compatriots in Belgrade, it appeared that Sino-U.S. ties had become part of the unanticipated collateral damage from the American war for Kosovo.

**E**ven before the incident in Belgrade, tensions in Sino-U.S. relations were coming into view. The unveiling of new defence guidelines for the U.S.-Japan military alliance, the U.S. commitment to the development and deployment of theatre missile defences, the NATO expansion to the East, the growing support in the U.S. for the causes of Taiwan and Tibet, the strengthening of the anti China sentiments in the U.S. political establishment and the uncertainty about China's entry in the WTO were all beginning to cast a shadow over the much touted strategic partnership between Washington and Beijing. The bombing incident helped crystallise Sino-U.S. tensions and may have begun to push the relationship into an uncharted territory.

Despite the tragic incident in Belgrade and the outburst of anti American sentiment that followed in China, Beijing appears determined not to let Kosovo undermine its expansive relationship with Washington. The Clinton administration, too, app-

ears eager to limit the fallout of the diplomatic disaster in its Balkan war and has responded with alacrity to Beijing's demand by repeatedly apologising at the highest level. It may be only a matter of time before U.S. and China begin to normalise their relations disrupted by the U.S. bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade.

**L**ess certain, however, is the ability of the two sides to restore the past warmth in bilateral ties. Even more doubtful is the capacity of the two nations to rebuild a broad domestic consensus in favour of mutual engagement. In the short term, Beijing may have effectively exploited the moral high ground it acquired after the loss of innocent Chinese lives in Belgrade. It has succeeded in mobilising much of the non-western public opinion in its favour and signalled to the West that China cannot be taken for granted. The re-emergence of uncertainty in Sino-U.S. relations poses fundamental political challenges to all major Asian nations, including India and Southeast Asia.

The small nations of Southeast Asia have always been extremely sensitive to the smallest of power shifts in Asia. Singapore for example has long been the most consistent advocate of structuring a stable balance of power in Asia. India on the other hand, has tended to emphasize Asian solidarity and non-alignment. The end of the Cold War brought into question non-alignment, the leitmotif of Indian foreign and security policies in the first few decades.

Many in India and outside have questioned the relevance of non-alignment after the collapse of bipolarity. Non-alignment between whom? What should be the central guiding principle of India's relations with the great powers in the post Cold War world? At the rhetorical level, New

Delhi appears reluctant to discard its commitment to non-alignment. At a popular level, there is a strong view that India must persist with the normative, liberal internationalist notions that originally drove India's enthusiasm for NAM (non-aligned movement). These include the importance of solidarity with the decolonized nations, opposition to power politics and military alliances, democratisation of the international order, emphasis on genuine multilateralism, and the promotion of global collective security.

India's formal emphasis on non-alignment should not, however, obfuscate the reality of a determined bid by India in the recent years to transform its bilateral relationships with all the major power centres of the world. Its new approaches to the great powers have been rooted in fairly realistic assessment of the altered power scenario. In fact, India's non-alignment during the Cold War could be interpreted as a deliberate play on the then prevailing power politics in the international system. Seeking to maximise its autonomy in the Cold War, India effectively used non-alignment as a policy to promote its perceived economic and political interests.

**F**or a country with few real cards to play in the international system, non-alignment offered the best route to promote its diplomatic profile on the world stage. It allowed India to become one of the few countries in the world to gain massive economic assistance from both camps in the international system, and yet retain the right to criticise both East and West on specific international issues.

The focus on non-alignment did not prevent India from developing a security policy that was sensitive to shifting alignments in its neighbourhood. Its productive relationship with

Moscow had the effect of balancing American military ties with Pakistan during the early Cold War. When a *de facto* strategic consensus emerged between Pakistan, China and the United States at the turn of the 1970s, India did not hesitate to deepen its relationship with the Soviet Union through a 'peace and friendship treaty' in 1971. While India was loath to call it an alliance, or acknowledge it as a departure from 'pure' non-alignment, it was for all practical purposes a security pact with the Soviet Union. And the treaty served India well for nearly two decades before the Soviet Union collapsed.

**A**t the turn of the 1990s, New Delhi quickly set about the task of reorienting its relations with the great powers. Recognizing the fact that the United States was now the sole superpower in the international system, India paid particular attention to building a new relationship with Washington. Although the United States loomed large on Indian foreign policy in the 1990s, the prospects for greater Indian autonomy, New Delhi calculated, rested on a revitalisation of relations with the other great powers – Russia, Western Europe, China and Japan. The basic Indian objective has remained unchanged: maximising room for manoeuvre.

The search for greater political space for itself in a unipolar world has also raised the prospects of formal or informal alliances with the great powers. One possibility is to look at a grand coalition between India, Russia, and China (some throw in Iran as well) to balance the overwhelming preponderance of the United States in the international system. The other option is to jump onto the U.S. bandwagon to maximise India's capabilities.

Neither of these options is likely to become a viable one for India's for-

eign policy. First, take the idea of a triangular or quadrangular alliance against the United States. It is painted in many different hues – a revamped anti-imperialist bloc, a newly resurgent Orient against the hegemonic Occident, or an alliance of the second tier powers against the hegemon. In any format, this proposed alliance is unworkable. No single power or a group of them is in a position to take on the might of the United States. India, China, Russia and Iran all need and are seeking cooperation with the United States to advance their own national development.

Although all four have innumerable political problems with the United States, they will find it impossible to structure an anti U.S. alliance. China, for all its formal rhetoric on promoting a multipolar world order, sees itself as becoming the second most important power centre in the world. Its preference could be a bipolar framework in Asia. India also knows that as permanent members of the UN Security Council and as the self-appointed guardians of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Washington, Moscow and Beijing have common interests, some of which may run counter to New Delhi's.

**E**qually unrealistic is the possibility of a formal Indian alliance with the United States aimed against China. Neither does the U.S. have any plans for a 'containment party' against China; nor would India want to see a new Cold War in Asia between the United States and China, which is India's largest neighbour. New Delhi's policy thrust will remain centred around an intensive and pragmatic engagement with both Washington and Beijing. India is likely to devote itself to the pursuit of an independent foreign policy that will maximise its freedom of manoeuvre in all directions.

Such an external orientation will be rooted in two basic propositions. First, India needs an intensification of cooperation with all the great powers without being tied down to the rigour of a strategic alliance with any one or a group of them. It has no reason to paint any one of the great powers as an enemy, and jump onto the band wagon of another to counter it. Second, the expansion of India's role in the world is likely to be achieved less by external political alliances and more by the rapid enhancement of its internal economic capabilities. For this reason, New Delhi must begin to define its foreign policy goals in modest and pragmatic manner while setting for itself purposeful and ambitious developmental goals at home.

**D**espite its unchanged rhetoric of non-alignment (which must only be seen as a code word for an autonomous foreign policy), India has begun to experiment with the politics of balance of power in a complex world. As a large nation, committed to an independent judgement on various issues India will find it difficult to become junior partner in any alliance system. However, India is likely to press ahead with its efforts to build 'special relationships' at the bilateral level with most of the major powers.

Following India's nuclear test in May 1998, there was a major and immediate disruption in Indian effort to engage the great powers. But ironically, India's declaration of itself as nuclear weapon power may have provided a new basis for resolving India's long standing non-proliferation disputes with the international community. With the United States, there has been a continuous dialogue aimed at reconciling India's security interests with global non-proliferation concerns. The outlines of an accommodation in which the U.S. would conce-



India's right to build a minimum nuclear deterrent and Indian participation in global arms control arrangements are visible.

This is the first time that the United States and India have engaged in such a sustained dialogue on security questions which has gone a long way in building a new understanding between the two nations. The U.S. approach to the recent Kargil crisis, which saw Washington side with India on a Kashmir related issue for the first time in the last five decades, has helped lay the basis for an important political departure in Indo-U.S. relations.

Similarly with China, the nuclear tests initially worsened New Delhi's ties with Beijing. But sustained efforts over the last year have helped overcome the rupture in Sino-Indian relations, and the two sides have agreed to put the relationship back on track. For the first time, India and China have agreed to initiate a 'security dialogue' that could provide a framework to discuss issues they have long found it convenient to sweep under the carpet. In the post Kosovo context, China has been more than keen to build a political relationship with India that would seek to minimise differences. The Chinese neutrality in the Kargil crisis, although tinged by an unwillingness to name Pakistan as the aggressor, has been well received in India.

After the Pokharan tests, India has also deepened its dialogue with the European Union – France in particular – and Russia, and is in the process of mending ties with Japan. Slowly but steadily, India is moving towards a realistic foreign policy framework that sheds some of its past emphases on ideology and political first principles. India is beginning to break out of its traditional defensive mindset and putting across a more self-confident and outward looking approach.

## Historical perspectives

A N RAM

FOR anyone who seeks to understand Southeast Asia, the French historian and doyen of Southeast Asian studies, G. Coedes' classic treatise, *The Indianized States of South-East Asia*, is a highly recommended reading. Coedes describes much of Southeast Asia and Indochina as 'Indianized' states, where two great civilizations of Asia, the Chinese and the Indian, merge and converge in unique harmony. Coedes calls this area 'Farther India': 'From Burma, Malaya peninsula and the island of Sumatra, the western face of Farther India is turned toward the Indian Ocean.'

The same thought, in a different context, is echoed by historian K.M. Panikkar, who in his brilliant exposition, *India and the Indian Ocean*, speaks about the 'influence of the Indian Ocean on the shaping of Indian history.' For Panikkar, the geographical 'imperative' of the Indian Ocean – and indeed the Himalaya in the North – has conditioned and shaped the history and civilisation of this subcontinent. 'The importance of geographical path on the development of history is only now receiving wide and general recognition,' he says.

**T**hat Southeast Asia has always been an integral part of the Indian consciousness is borne out by the fact that the countries of Southeast Asia so comprehensively embraced Buddhism in all its aspects. This spiritual and cultural affinity became an inseparable part of their ethos and way of life. Successive Indian kings and kingdoms from the first century AD and even before to the beginning of the 15th century, had regarded Southeast Asia and the lands lying beyond as vital for their own strength, security and sustained development. This intricate and abiding web of relationships in turn contributed significantly to India's sense of security in an extended neighbourhood in which India is neither seen as an alien power nor as a country with a colonial past. The relationship spanning nearly 2500 years was founded and nurtured on mutual interest and security in which both partners constantly enriched and reinforced each other.

The advent of the British in India and the struggle for influence between European powers that ensued all over Southeast Asia, suspended the continuous interaction that had existed between India and the region. Southeast Asia itself was carved up into areas of influence by the major colo-

nial powers, viz., the British, French, Dutch and Portuguese. India's cultural and commercial interaction with this region was therefore subordinated to the political and strategic considerations of the great powers. This left the 'Indianized' states of 'Farther India' free to nurture, develop and evolve a distinct cultural personality of their own, albeit heavily influenced by their long association with India and China.

**I**ndependent India, preoccupied with pressing domestic and other problems, took time to revive its age-old and all encompassing links with Southeast Asia. The end of the war and the decolonisation process in Southeast Asia, in turn, sucked these countries into the very core of the Cold War, leaving them totally submerged in its power play. In fact, many of these countries, for geopolitical and strategic reasons, were left with no choice other than to align with one or the other of the two superpowers in their quest for elusive security and promise of prosperity and development.

In the Cold War context, non-aligned India was perceived by the West as being inimical to its interests. Therefore, its Southeast Asian allies were discouraged from taking a non-partisan view of India and building independent relations with this neighbouring country. Not that India was immune from the vortex of Cold War politics. Our own close links with the erstwhile Soviet Union and an independent non-aligned foreign policy were sufficient reasons for the West to project and perceive India as tied to the apron strings of the erstwhile Soviet Union and to be viewed with a great deal of reserve and suspicion. The net result of this was that India and Southeast Asia drifted further apart, their relations lacking in substance, renewal and content.

For a brief period in the mid to late 1960s after the Sino-Indian conflict and emergence of China on the international scene, some Southeast Asian states did endeavour to explore the possibility of drawing India into their fold, as a possible partner in the context of their concerns over the lengthening Chinese shadows in the region. The tentative suggestion to invite India to become a member of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) mooted by some had to be seen in the context of ASEAN's own concerns and perceptions at the time of possible expansionist design and the threat of subversion from communist China. The events in Indonesia and China's increased presence and profile in Indochina caused some consternation in Southeast Asia and possibly beyond. The creation of ASEAN in 1967 was also in response to this prevailing perception. Unfortunately, India was neither prepared nor in a mood to join this nascent grouping of Southeast Asian countries. Consequently, an important opportunity to renew and develop strong and abiding links with the countries of Southeast Asia was missed.

**F**rom then on, the hiatus in India-Southeast Asia relations continued unabated. India was perceived by many as too close to the erstwhile Soviet Union for any meaningful partnership. India's policy towards Cambodia, when we were one of the few countries to support and recognize Soviet backed government in that country, caused an enormous setback to our relations with other Southeast Asian countries. For Southeast Asia this was a test of India's objectivity: a leader of the non-aligned movement. That India chose, for her own valid and compelling reasons, not to take what was regarded as an objective position, has not been forgotten.

most Southeast Asian leaders, scholars and opinion makers.

India's efforts to normalise relations with ASEAN, both bilaterally and as a regional association, met with limited success in the late '80s. It is against this background that Prime Minister Narasimha Rao came to power and took some bold and far reaching initiatives to restore normal relations with ASEAN and the countries of Southeast Asia. His 'Look East' policy was well calculated and thought out. He saw the end of the Cold War as an opportunity to broaden India's relations and to focus on countries which were our traditional, and long standing friends of special importance to India.

**S**outheast Asia, under the ASEAN umbrella, had already become one of the new growth areas: countries like Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and even Indonesia were making rapid strides. They were variously being described as newly industrialised countries (NICs) and success stories. In the mid '90s, after joining ASEAN, Vietnam also showed what was possible given pragmatic policies and the right opportunities. ASEAN, in short, was seen as a model for India to emulate. ASEAN had also become a rapidly growing source of investments, technology, trade and tourism for India (Table 1). It was impossible for India not to take note of this dynamic region which offered a real opportunity and a new, diversified option.

ASEAN too, surfeit with capital and exportable goods and technology, was looking for new markets to further its growth prospects. Many ASEAN heads of states had declared their intention of making their countries members of the 'richman's club' by 2020. This vision needed to be translated through a pragmatic foreign policy in regard to potential partners

— China, and more recently India, for obvious reasons, being on top of the list. ASEAN found it of great interest to launch a 'Look West' policy of its own, primarily focusing on India.

The early '90s were a propitious time for India to vigorously launch and pursue a policy of intensifying, deepening and expanding relations with the countries of Southeast Asia. At the same time, in some ASEAN quarters, there were still lingering reservations about India's reliability as a partner in view of the entrenched perception that India had failed the ASEAN countries during their most trying times. Mindful of the difficulties that existed about opening up, Narasimha Rao first wanted to dismantle the barriers and create a cli-

mate of confidence between India and Southeast Asia. His first visit abroad outside the Indian subcontinent, after becoming prime minister was planned to Thailand, the closest ASEAN neighbour.

The Thais took their own time to respond to this initiative but when the Rao visit eventually took place in April 1993, it was a resounding success. Both countries agreed to expand bilateral linkages in trade, investments, joint ventures, education, HRD, culture and at the people to people level. In a symbolic gesture, which was deeply appreciated by the conservative Buddhist society of Thailand, visa fees was waived for Thai monks visiting India on pilgrimage. An India Study Centre, the first of its

TABLE 1

Recent Trends Pertaining to ASEAN-India Trade

India's Exports (in million US \$)

Country	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	% Change
Brunei	0.38	2.16	6.93	6.26	2.08	-66.77
Indonesia	210.54	249.11	633.07	592.91	434.97	-26.64
Laos	0.21	0.11	0.31	0.41	0.64	56.10
Malaysia	221.62	257.01	375.75	531.98	480.78	-9.62
Myanmar	19.30	20.32	28.84	28.84	46.08	59.58
Philippines	52.19	89.19	137.85	185.55	235.56	26.95
Singapore	673.90	691.03	861.71	977.51	738.20	-24.48
Thailand	319.46	364.75	451.97	450.61	337.27	-25.15
Vietnam	25.11	52.54	118.86	117.57	121.21	3.10
Total	1522.70	1726.22	2615.29	2891.64	2396.79	-17.11

India's Imports (in million US \$)

Country	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	% Change
Brunei	0.00	0.11	0.05	0.06	0.00	-100.00
Indonesia	107.23	289.07	440.71	608.98	729.07	19.72
Laos	0.00	0.53	NA	NA	0.01	
Malaysia	223.53	439.65	862.75	1030.91	1184.18	14.87
Myanmar	108.46	113.72	155.16	168.65	218.19	29.37
Philippines	5.33	10.56	20.52	16.76	27.85	66.17
Singapore	561.71	807.12	1064.00	1080.94	1186.80	9.79
Thailand	51.27	153.95	162.18	199.92	230.15	15.12
Vietnam	39.28	239.62	14.81	1.75	7.34	319.43
Total	1096.80	1854.33	2720.18	3107.97	3583.59	15.30

kind, was inaugurated by the prime minister at the prestigious Thammasat University and academic links were intensified. It was decided to increase slots for Thai students desirous of pursuing studies in India, research proposals were identified for implementation, political level dialogue between two countries was initiated, and an ambitious trade target agreed upon.

**B**riefly, Rao succeeded in opening new avenues for evolving a mutually beneficial partnership with Thailand. He was received by the King of Thailand and given an audience for nearly two hours, a rare gesture. In my view, much credit is due to Rao for his foresight and vision that led to our Look East policy of which he was the unquestioned author and architect. He also made several short visits to other ASEAN countries during the next few years. This gave impetus and substance to the rapidly growing bilateral relations with ASEAN which was reflected at the regional level in India's evolving links with ASEAN. He directed that special attention be paid to strengthening and deepening bilateral relations with ASEAN countries recognising that at the regional level it is the sum total of bilateral interaction which would make us a desired partner.

India's Look East policy, to a great extent, was propelled and conditioned by the difficult economic situation in the country in the early 1990s. India had unfortunately missed the first wave of economic reforms in the late 1970s and 1980s and failed to benefit from the ongoing process of globalisation. Our economy was under great stress and strain and needed an infusion of new ideas, economic reforms, capital, technology, a large dose of investments in socio-economic infrastructure and modern-

isation. India's domestic and regional economic space was too constrained for a large country like ours to grow in a rapidly globalised world economy.

An obvious and natural extension of India's economic space, it was perceived, was ASEAN which in the 1980s had emerged as a significant and promising growth area of the world. With a combined population of nearly 400 million today and a land area larger than India's, ASEAN's GDP is in the region of US \$ 400 billion; its exports, already significant, have grown steadily and are in the region of US \$220 billion; it is an important destination for foreign investments and a major source of investments abroad.

In so far as India is concerned, in less than four years from 1992, our two way trade has more than doubled; in 1996-97, it stood at US \$ 6 billion and a target of US \$ 15 billion set for the year 2001 seemed attainable. From negligible investments in 1992, investment approvals from ASEAN upto 1997 were in excess of US \$ 5 billion (Table 2). In the reverse direction, ASEAN accounts for a significant proportion of Indian investments abroad. Significantly, the region has emerged as a promising growth area in trade, investments, joint ventures, tourism, etc. The potential for incre-

ased cooperation, though immense, is largely untapped.

Just as for India ASEAN has emerged as a major economic space, for ASEAN too India has emerged as an attractive destination for export of goods, services, technology and capital. Faced with growing difficulties in accessing and sustaining growth in traditional markets, both players see opportunities to develop a mutually beneficial partnership.

The recent financial crisis in Southeast and East Asia, in fact, should have been seen as an opportunity for enhanced economic and commercial interaction. Unfortunately, India was slow to appreciate the nature and extent of the crisis and failed to make use of this opportunity to explore new avenues of partnership. While China and the other major regional powers not only demonstrated solidarity with ASEAN by providing financial support (bailout package) as also specific bilateral cooperation measures, India did not come up with any meaningful proposals.

The crisis could have hastened and helped ASEAN investment flows and trade with India: In the end, ASEAN investments and trade with India actually decreased (see tables). Yet another missed opportunity! The crisis, happily, seems to be ending

TABLE 2

Country	ASEAN Investments in India (in million US \$)							Total Approvals
	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	
Brunei	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Indonesia	0.00	0.54	0.11	0.00	89.51	10.71	2.80	103.67
Laos	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Malaysia	0.05	1.27	2.42	7.21	396.03	12.09	565.96	985.03
Myanmar	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Philippines	0.00	1.43	3.78	1.17	20.84	81.05	1.31	109.58
Singapore	0.39	17.20	19.07	7.59	283.15	91.36	231.69	650.45
Thailand	0.00	0.72	105.26	2.85	562.31	21.86	6.97	699.97
Vietnam	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.01
Total	0.44	21.16	130.64	18.82	1351.84	217.08	808.73	2548.71

Now with ASEAN and East Asian countries 'exporting' their way out of trouble. India will have to look to the future by taking advantage of the expected sustained recovery of the ASEAN economies in the coming years.

It is precisely this rationale that hastened the process of India being invited to become a sectoral dialogue partner of ASEAN in 1992 and, thereafter, in a relatively short period being elevated to full dialogue partner status in 1996. Many ASEAN leaders openly conceded that they found India's participation in their activities very useful. The four areas of cooperation, viz., trade, investment, science and technology and tourism have since been enlarged and given content through the setting up of working groups on trade and investments and science and technology.

A notable feature of cooperation in trade and investment is a study of India-AFTA (Asean Free Trade Area) linkages aimed at exploring enhanced trade and investment opportunities. Simultaneously, at the level of business and industry, an ASEAN-India Business Council (AIBC) and an India-Asean Economic Cooperation Committee (AIECC) have been functioning. Direct meetings between the business entities and industry associations of the two sides have been held regularly. The working group on science and technology has registered notable successes and joint programmes have been evolved.

The setting up of an ASEAN-India Informatics Centre at India's initiative and through Indian funding has opened up a potentially important area for Indo-ASEAN cooperation. The other areas of enlarged cooperation include human resource development, people to people contact, tourism and cultural and academic exchanges.

That all this has been achieved in a short span of 5-6 years speaks for itself and demonstrates that both India and ASEAN look at this evolving partnership with hope and expectation.

India has also participated as a full member in the Asean Regional Forum (ARF) since 1996. ARF is an ASEAN driven regional security forum which has as its members all the ASEAN countries and the major non-regional powers including the U.S., Russia, China, Japan, EU, Australia, Canada and India (there are at present 21 members). India's participation in the ARF meetings has largely been unspectacular though quietly pragmatic. It has given us an opportunity to understand in the changed context ASEAN perspectives on strategic issues having economic and political ramifications as also explain our perspectives on major regional and other issues.

The ARF is not a security forum or an alliance; it is a forum for exchange of views and consultations among member countries. India is able to have a dialogue with her extended neighbourhood partners with a view to moving forward incrementally in building trust and understanding each others security concerns. The opportunity of having bilateral meetings on the sidelines of ARF has been particularly useful in so far as India is concerned. For example, at the recently concluded Singapore ARF meeting, India's foreign minister was able to talk with the foreign ministers of the U.S., China, Australia, Japan, E.U. and the ASEAN countries who now have a much better idea of India's concerns and perspectives.

ARF has also demolished the Cold War myth of India-Pak 'parity' in the eyes and calculations of major powers. India comes to the ARF as a

major power and is now seen outside the prism of Indo-Pak equations as a distinct emerging power centre which is responsible, able and willing to play a constructive role consistent with its regional and global interests. India's decision, announced at Singapore, to support the ASEAN nuclear free zone is at once a reflection of this reality and India's geopolitical interests in this important neighbouring region. Likewise, India's views and concerns on issues like terrorism and its nexus with drug trafficking, dangers of extremism and fundamentalism and the restraint exercised by India in the Kargil conflict have all found ready resonance in the ARF forum.

While our Look East policy was undoubtedly well conceived, articulated and successfully implemented in the early years, there are signs that we may be losing the momentum and consequently a historic opportunity. Our bilateral relations with the 10 members of the ASEAN, though trouble free, have not yet evolved into a meaningful partnership in which both sides have a vital stake. ASEAN trade and investments in India, after an initial spurt, have stagnated, in part because of ASEAN's own preoccupation with the financial crisis in the region, but also largely due to its disillusionment with India's daunting procedures, requirements and an unresponsive bureaucracy. India's trade, likewise, has not lived up to the promise of the early 1990s when bilateral trade with Thailand alone had exceeded US \$ 1 billion and was growing at a healthy 25% per annum.

The 'flagship' ASEAN companies which had hoped to make India their hub for future operations are apparently having second thoughts and have slowed down their involvement. The now abandoned Tata-SIA

airline project and the project to build a new airport at Bangalore for which a consortium of ASEAN and Indian companies had made a bid, are cited as examples of India's inability to benefit from ASEAN capital, technology and entrepreneurship even in a priority area like infrastructure. These two cases, more than anything else, have been responsible for a change in perception about India among ASEAN investors.

**T**he list of proposals that have not materialised even after protracted negotiations, delays and waiting is too long to be recounted and does make potential investors wonder whether India is in fact serious in promoting foreign investments and joint ventures. The damage has been incalculable and will take a long time to correct. One of the biggest problems facing ASEAN investors is their inability to comprehend and come to terms with the maze of India's multi-layered administration and business practices. It must be candidly pointed out that India's private sector too has been unable to respond adequately to the challenge. India's joint venture partners generally look to the immediate future and short term gains in establishing partnerships.

Another related problem is our inability to identify and propose projects particularly in the infrastructure sector and indicate the terms on which these are being offered to foreign investors. There is a suggestion of non-transparency in our approach. ASEAN's interest in some road and highway projects is a case in point. The result has been that major ASEAN investments in India have been slow to take off. In many cases proposals have been abandoned (for example, a major fishery project). We are now left with small projects in relatively low priority areas. They will

move along only because they are too small to call for new policy initiatives or effort. In this climate it is difficult to visualise how ASEAN investments will prosper in the foreseeable future. These, however, are early days. Perhaps both sides will weather the difficulties and remain on course for the promise which the future holds.

**H**ere it is pertinent to remark that the ASEAN model is of special relevance and interest to India. In spite of the remarkable progress they have achieved, ASEAN countries are still at a developing stage, lacking a self-sustaining industrial and human resource base needed to propel and sustain a high growth economy. At the same time their experience in managing reforms, liberalisation and coping with globalisation holds many lessons for India. Many of them are today well integrated with the global economy and able to manage the socio-economic fallout and negative effects of globalisation. ASEAN experience in evolving modern banking and financial structures is also noteworthy (notwithstanding the recent crisis in Southeast Asia and the collapse of some leading financial institutions).

There are other areas too in which the experience of ASEAN is relevant, for example, investments in education, primary health, population control, poverty alleviation, environmental protection and building of the socio-economic infrastructure to sustain economic growth. It is a model that we might profitably study and emulate with appropriate changes. Indeed, the evolution of ASEAN itself brings out many lessons for regional cooperation under SAARC and shows how to achieve incremental progress towards harmonising and integrating our economies to mutual advantage.

ASEAN has successfully experimented with growth areas and

identified and evolved synergies and complementarities. Today, it is poised to optimise its potential not only through individual effort of its members but also by effective regional and global cooperation. Its future vision is not dissimilar to our own for a prosperous SAARC. While comparisons are sometimes invidious there is always scope to profit from each others experiences.

Our Look East policy in recent months has also stalled because of a preoccupation with domestic problems. Few visits have been exchanged between India and ASEAN. There has been no head of state/government level visit in either direction in 1998 (there were five or six such visits in 1997). Exchanges at other levels have also dried up. There are, evidently, no new initiatives on the anvil at the government or Track II level. ASEAN, though preoccupied with its own crisis, seems to have momentarily relegated relations with India to the backburner. Their disillusionment with India has only made things slide further. This hiatus must be corrected if Indo-ASEAN relations are to move forward.

**A**dmittedly, governments cannot do everything; their primary responsibility is to create propitious conditions and provide a policy and administrative framework conducive to promoting partnership. The private sectors of the two sides have an equal responsibility. Here Track II has a special responsibility to come up with new ideas and initiatives. Unfortunately, there is at present no Track II forum in India to play this role. The entire civil society, including business leaders and operators, academics, media persons, opinion moulders, cultural personalities and the government must play their part in reviving the stalled Look East policy.

Apart from forging and strengthening abiding links with ASEAN in pursuit of her Look East policy, India will also need to take a fresh look at the opportunities of partnerships in the Asia-Pacific region as a whole. This region, which includes such strong and vibrant economies as Japan, China, Taiwan, Korea, Australia and Hong Kong, already accounts for over 40% of our economic exposure and is both strategically and economically important to India. The APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Community) extends from the Pacific coast of the Americas to Australasia and includes the whole of Southeast Asia, thus bringing India in the 'footprint' of this region.

**R**ecognising this, India has not only given importance to diversifying and developing bilateral economic linkages with these economies, but has also sought to become a member of APEC. This, unfortunately, has not yet materialised, though India qualifies both in terms of geographical location and an ability to contribute to the development of the Asia-Pacific region. However, it is significant that in 1997, India did succeed in becoming a participant in two of the APEC working groups, viz. on energy and industrial science and technology. However, at the APEC summit meeting held in Canada in 1997, a moratorium on inducting new members was imposed. India should use the intervening period to comply with the criteria and requirements for membership and intensify bilateral economic links with the countries of the region.

Unfortunately, as in the case of ASEAN, we seem to have lost momentum and our participation in the working group meetings so far has either been extremely purposeless or simply proforma. There is little

awareness of the significance and benefits of APEC membership. It must be pursued seriously through intensified lobbying with member countries and by regularly placing it on the agenda of our high level political dialogues with important member countries like the U.S. and Japan.

**T**here are many within APEC who continue to harbour reservations about India's ability to participate effectively in the forum; there are others who believe that India's compliance with APEC and WTO requirements is unsatisfactory. There are also those who are reluctant to bring India into the fold for fear that India may distract attention by bringing up extraneous issues. Our diplomacy will have to dispel such doubts. India's goal should clearly be to first become an effective member of all the three working groups and thereafter to pursue membership by demonstrably complying with the rules of the 'APEC club'.

India's non-inclusion in the Asia-Europe (ASEM) dialogue is also most unfortunate. India is at the heart of Asia and a major economy and a political power; her absence from this forum makes little sense. Here again, entrenched perceptions of the members of ASEM about India are, apparently, a stumbling block. Indian diplomacy will have to work hard to ensure that India's case does not go by default.

In pursuit of our extended neighbourhood policy, in 1997, India had made a good beginning in sub-regional cooperation with some immediate neighbours in the Bay of Bengal region. This nascent cooperation arrangement involving two countries of ASEAN, viz. Thailand and Myanmar and three countries of SAARC, viz. Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and India, called BIMSTC, was meant to explore

and optimise cooperation in trade, transport, tourism and infrastructure by developing sub-regional linkages and synergising opportunities on the basis of mutual advantage and complementarity.

This is a sound approach and needs to be pursued more actively. Here again, our authorities have failed to grasp the importance of sub-regional cooperation and follow up on some agreed upon arrangements at the 1997 meeting of BIMSTC ministers. Our initial response to such proposals as the setting up of a regional airline, shipping service and connecting the region by a road network has been hesitant and slow. The other sub-regional SAARC grouping involving India, Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh, has also failed to take off effectively.

**T**he approach based on evolution of growth areas and sub-regional cooperation had proved successful in Southeast Asia and elsewhere. India must make better use of these emerging opportunities to compete in a complex environment. India has no choice but to adopt a multi-layer approach to benefit from her geographical location at the meeting points of the Indian and the Pacific Oceans and the vast hinterlands spread on both flanks of India.

Both Coedes and Panikkar were, in fact, referring to this civilisational and geographical advantage which not only gives India a unique opportunity but also makes it imperative for her to pursue an extended neighbourhood policy. It would be in consonance with Indian history, geography and traditional links with friends and partners in the region who have enriched each other for thousands of years. This, in essence, is the rationale and imperative of our Look East, extended neighbourhood policy.

# A measured tread to the future

ALKA ACHARYA

THE dominant paradigm in which India-China relations are generally analyzed is essentially one of competitive power politics. Within this dominant paradigm, two broad strands may be discerned. The first entails looking at the post Cold War world as providing a new world of opportunities for cooperation in a number of fields. The competition between them takes on somewhat benign contours and far greater possibilities are visualized for the two countries to work in tandem to refashion the new emerging world order along more multipolar, democratic and equitable lines. The other strand views the two countries as locked in a 'balance of power' politics, their relationship characterized by rivalry for regional dominance and their long term strategies predicated on their objective of playing an influential role in the emerging world order.

These two virtually exclusivist viewpoints appear rather static and somewhat at odds with the dynamism of global politics, particularly in the post Cold War world which appears to be characterized by shifting alignments, changing interests and a more integrative approach to strategic concerns. The situation in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the socialist bloc and that which prevails in the post Kosovo world for instance, requires a far more nuanced and layered interpretation of relationships than that offered by the above approaches. Not only that, with the forces of glo-

balization and the dominance of the capitalist world economy, a new set of forces are bearing down on old notions of power and sovereignty.

Furthermore, an entirely different set of concerns are moving onto the national agendas, viz., concerns regarding the environment, finite sources of energy, poverty and under-development. Graver challenges are emerging with greater threat potential than simply military ones – cross border terrorism, narco terrorism, ethnicity and fundamentalism, among others. This is not to suggest that the strategic concerns of the past are no longer valid or that the asymmetry in India and China's respective power positions is no longer critical. The point is that those strategic concerns and power equations have to be assessed and analyzed in new, flexible and inclusivist paradigms.

Events over the past year and a half at the global, regional and domestic levels have brought about a discernable change in the attitude of both countries towards the outstanding problems between them. A sense of urgency and greater purpose seems to mark the policy initiatives and overtures from both sides as well as the interaction and discussion between them. These developments were primarily three: the Indian nuclear explosions of May 1998, the U.S. led NATO bombings of Kosovo and the 'mistaken' bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, and the Pakistani adventure in Kargil. An addi-



tional factor is that of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and associated separatist movements in China's Xinjiang province. All these can be seen as cumulatively having contributed to once again reasserting the centrality of India-China relations in the region as well as virtually elevating India in China's worldview.

There are five sets of complex, multidimensional issues which can in fact be considered as constituting the problem areas in India-China relations. Some of these are old, others new; some a legacy of the Cold War and others a result of the fallout of the end of the Cold War. These issues are, by their very nature, unlikely to be resolved soon and will continue to exercise the minds of leaders and policy makers well into the next millennium. The manner in which the two countries deal with and manage them will shape the nature of this relationship in the years to come.

**E**ver since May 1998, the Indian nuclear tests have dominated India-China relations. It was not until Jaswant Singh's visit in June 1999 that a semblance of normality returned. The problem is not just a bilateral one however. The stand that China has taken as a permanent member of the Security Council (P-5) and as one of the five nuclear nations (N-5) is also a factor in the way in which the issue will be dealt with between them. But we shall return to this later. Any analysis of India-China relations inevitably, and necessarily, begins with the border problem. This can justifiably be described as the root of all discord, the source of suspicion and mistrust and the most difficult/intractable of all problems between India and China.

It is not our objective to go into the historical background of this problem or describe the events which led to the 1962 war. Suffice it to say that des-

pite the profusion of writing by researchers and journalists and memoirs of officials and army personnel from India, the non-availability of official records continues to be a source of frustration and amazement. Not only does it prevent a definitive and conclusive assessment, but by keeping the actual course of events under wraps, it continues to deny us the opportunity to come to terms with that debacle.

**I**t was Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China at the end of 1988 which re-launched the India-China dialogue in general and the border question in particular at the highest political level. The setting up of a Joint Working Group (JWG) to explore the boundary question finally brought India-China negotiations out of cold storage. The expectations that the border question was finally nearing resolution did not quite materialize though. However, the decade of the nineties, till the Indian nuclear explosions, can in retrospect be seen as the most cordial phase of India-China relations since 1962.

There were two landmark agreements in 1993 and 1996: the first during Narasimha Rao's China visit, was an Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the Border Areas; the second during Li Peng's South Asian visit was an Agreement on Confidence Building Measures in the Military Field along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas. The latter was hailed as virtually a 'no-war pact', and between them the two agreements did manage to enhance the atmosphere of cordiality and goodwill.

There was also a slow but distinct turn in China's South Asia policy in which a more even handed approach towards both India and Pakistan replaced the overt tilt in favour of Pakistan. This was witnessed fairly

unambiguously during Jiang Zemin's South Asia visit in November-December 1997 when he advised the Pakistanis to put the Kashmir problem on the back burner and focus on mending relations with India.

This was also their approach as far as the India-China border was concerned. The policy seemed to be to 'temporarily shelve' or freeze contentious issues till more propitious circumstances came to prevail. In the meanwhile, both countries would concentrate on strengthening and intensifying cultural, economic and commercial interaction geared to mutual benefit and advantage. Common interests, carefully nurtured, would thus help keep suspicion and ill-will in check. In the process, some crystallization of both government and public opinion would provide the pointer to an eventual settlement.

**T**he approach to the border in the post nuclear period continues to be characterized by this sentiment. Given the undefined nature of the disputed areas and an inability to evolve acceptable parameters for settlement, the progress so far has been somewhat like 'one step forward two steps back'. There are unlikely to be any dramatic breakthroughs. The argument that the uncertainty over settling the border dispute is not in India's interests is indeed persuasive. The longer uncertainty regarding the border prevails, the greater the chances that the asymmetrical power positions, or unforeseen circumstances, or both, would once again bring the two countries on a collision path. Undoubtedly, in shelving the 'problems left over by history', the lessons of history must not be forgotten. The matter has to be tackled within a long term strategic perspective, evidence of which is not quite forthcoming on the Indian side. More important, both the proposals

made and the understanding reached, has to be clear and unambiguous.

Yet another issue in India-China relations is that of Tibet. Officially the Chinese have admitted that the Indian government has not encouraged, fostered or promoted the Dalai Lama or his growing international profile. But the existence of a substantial Tibetan refugee population and a Tibetan government-in-exile on Indian soil does complicate the scenario. Additionally, a prominent section of the Indian elite is extremely favourably disposed towards the Tibetan aspirations for independence. Equally, within the community of Indian strategic analysts, there are some who champion the notion of an independent Tibet acting as a buffer between India and China. Chinese strategic literature has often expressed doubts about India's adherence/commitment to Tibet being a part of China.

**U**nder the circumstances, there seems to be virtually no likelihood of any change in India's official policy as regards Tibet. Any other option, given the current power balance, would be nothing short of folly. As it is China loses no opportunity to condemn/protest what it sees as Indian acquiescence in the activities of the Tibetan 'splittists'. The point may be made that perhaps there is not enough appreciation in India about Chinese apprehensions regarding Indian intentions vis-à-vis Tibet. The post Pokhran II phase in fact saw the reiteration of pro Tibetan sentiments in India, though the Government of India quickly distanced itself from such sentiments. The defence minister's views on the Tibetan question will be sure to create problems as well.

The Indian nuclear tests threw into sharp relief Indian concerns about Pakistan's China connection and the nature of nuclear cooperation

between them. As mentioned earlier, the Chinese policy towards the sub-continent in the post Cold War period has been undergoing a change in favour of a more even handed approach. In their reaction to the Indian, and shortly thereafter the Pakistani, nuclear tests, the Chinese were far more critical of India than Pakistan. They saw the latter as essentially reactive in nature compared to the Indian tests, which were seen as without any provocation. Of course, Vajpayee's letter to Clinton had been responsible for much of the harshness of the Chinese reaction.

**T**here is a fairly strong conviction within India that Pakistan's nuclear build up and technological knowhow is largely of China's making. As pointed out in the context of the discussion on Tibet, there is insufficient appreciation in India regarding the Chinese apprehensions about Indian intentions vis-a-vis Tibet. However, the same could easily be said about Indian apprehensions regarding the nature and extent of Chinese assistance to Pakistan's conventional and nuclear build up, which is obviously targeted at India.

In June 1999 for instance, even as the Kargil conflict was underway, China and Pakistan signed an agreement to develop and manufacture an indigenous advanced fighter aircraft, the Super 7. As usual the Chinese government claimed that the arms deal was not aimed at any third country and only meant to provide 'self-defence capability to Pakistan' with whom they have a 'time tested friendship'. However, the Chinese made a special effort to project what has been termed a 'neutral' posture during the Kargil conflict. It could be argued that the absence of an unambiguously pro Pakistan statement in a situation where a clear violation of international

norms had occurred, does not entirely amount to 'neutrality'. Nonetheless, by not supporting Pakistan in a clearcut manner, the Chinese position, along with that of the U.S. and a large majority of the international community, contributed to bringing the Kargil conflict to an end with greater dispatch. To that extent the Chinese attitude was widely welcomed in India. Nonetheless, Pakistan is likely to be a rather long term factor in India-China relations.

Pokhran II constituted the second major occasion since 1962 (the first being the Sumdorong Chu incident of 1986) in which India-China relations became crisis ridden. It is not our objective to go into the events and developments of the post May 1998 period which are only too well known by now. Suffice it to say that the sharp and bitter exchanges that followed raised grave doubts about the validity of the general belief that India-China relations had achieved a mature and more enduring basis for the resolution of their outstanding problems.

**I**n the initial phase of the post Pokhran II period, there were two dimensions to the Chinese position. The first related to the implications of Vajpayee's letter to Clinton in which he cited China as the major reason for India's nuclear tests. This angered (and also hurt) the Chinese tremendously, causing a setback to the process of confidence building that had been underway. (So much so that the Chinese unilaterally decided to indefinitely postpone the JWG meeting.) Not only was it seen as having been done with 'the purpose of finding an excuse for the development of (India's) nuclear weapons,' but it also had the effect of pushing aside the substantive aspect of the questions pertaining to India-China relations raised by Pokhran II.

The second aspect related to the Chinese stand as a P-5 and N-5 member. The post Cold War has seen the Chinese placing a great deal of emphasis on their role as a responsible and responsive member of the global community and as a major upholder of the global nonproliferation regime. They have therefore been reiterating the Security Council decision 1172 that India should sign the NPT and in effect roll back its nuclear programme. In other words, there is no question of recognizing either India or Pakistan as nuclear powers. This has also prevented them from extending the benefit of their own earlier logic of self-defence for going nuclear to India. They in fact stress the drastically different global situation of 1964 (the year the Chinese exploded their nuclear device) to that prevailing in 1998. The world opinion is now definitely against nuclear weapons and India is going 'against the tide of the times' quite apart from having forced Pakistan to follow suit and thus unleashed an arms race in the subcontinent. In the Chinese view, nuclear competition, and therefore instability, in South Asia has to be taken very seriously indeed and the onus for this lies squarely with India.

**A**s mentioned earlier, it was Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh's visit to China in June 1999 that finally 'untied the knot' in bilateral relations caused by the May 1988 nuclear tests. This brought about a definite change in Chinese attitude and behaviour. First, they agreed to put the 'hurt' behind them as indicated in their acceptance of Singh's explanation that India did not consider China a threat. The contradiction between the position of the Indian defence minister and the foreign minister was glossed over. This, while implying a certain understanding on the part of the Chinese of the

logic of India going nuclear, did not exempt India from signing the CTBT and the NPT. That, according to the official Chinese view, would be the best conclusion possible to the nuclear imbroglio in the region.

**S**econd, they responded positively to Singh's proposal for a security dialogue, the nature and contents of which would be decided over a period of time. A security dialogue had been mooted before Pokhran II which had not gone very far. There continues to be a great deal of ambiguity about the levels at which this dialogue should be initiated and the gamut of issues that would be addressed. It is also not clear at this stage how the two countries would tackle the nuclear issue, though the need to bring it into the ambit of discussions has been recognized.

It has been suggested at non official levels that although China would be unable, and unwilling, to accept India as a *de jure* nuclear power, a *de facto* acceptance could form a basis of the discussions in a separate dialogue between them. Given that understanding, proposals regarding 'no first use' of nuclear weapons cannot be made or considered within formal, governmental frameworks.

There have also been suggestions that the above need not be a hindrance to the security dialogue, since a clause in the 1996 Agreement about neither side using its 'military capability' against the other can be interpreted broadly to include nuclear capability as well. It is obvious, therefore, that this is a complex issue and one is not at all certain about the depth and range of the meeting ground between them, particularly as regards the strategic situation in South Asia, the post Kosovo situation and the common concerns regarding the U.S. notwithstanding. The positive fallout has been with regard to the common per-

ception that confidence building measures have not only to be revived, but also intensified.

An issue which is certain to take on bigger and wider dimensions not just at the bilateral and regional but also at the global level, is that of Islamic fundamentalism and cross border terrorism and the shape that these may acquire. The Chinese are apprehensive that this could well escalate into something more serious, particularly in the light of the developments in Xinjiang. It may be recalled that the violent campaign launched by the Uygurs since the mid-nineties has gradually intensified and the likelihood of its escalation into a separatist or secessionist movement could well spin beyond the capacity of the Chinese state to handle.

**T**here have been reports of riots, bombings, killings, assassinations of Uygur leaders who are perceived as 'pro Chinese' and demonstrations of independence. There is sufficient evidence that the Chinese are taking this matter seriously, though they view the problem essentially as a domestic one. The official media has projected it as a 'law and order' problem and the government has adopted tough measures, including legislation of anti-terrorist laws to deal with what is seen as seriously 'harming national security'. Barely a month ago, 18 Muslim separatists were sentenced to between one and 15 years in prison for spreading 'splittist theories' in Xinjiang and 'for undermining the unity of the motherland.'

Pakistan's role in instigating cross border terrorism and insurgency in Kashmir has been a grave problem for India, particularly since the government of Pakistan has acknowledged that it continues to provide moral, political and diplomatic support to the militants in Kashmir. That

support lately took the form of actual hostilities as Pakistan sent its regular troops in the guise of militants into Indian territory resulting in a heavy loss of lives. As India moves towards cooperation and consultation, especially with Russia and the United States against state sponsored and cross border terrorism, China's own worries over Pakistan's role in this regard and the possibility of spillover effects of Islamic fundamentalism in Afghanistan, would require some action on its part.

**A**t the domestic level, China is likely to continue to step up efforts to control and contain the wave of unrest and violence unleashed by the 'national separatists and religious extremists.' On the external front, China would most likely take up the issue with Pakistan, as it reportedly already has, as well as discuss ways and means with Russia and other countries of Central Asia, particularly Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan for building a broader defence against this threat. This is thus an important issue on which India and China are likely to hold broadly similar and common positions.

The problem is two fold: on the one hand, the economic development of these areas which are quite backward with large pockets of poverty and the absence of adequate educational and health facilities, which in many ways is the root of the problem, has to be accorded top priority. On the other, the state has to control violence without facing criticism about human rights violations, thereby inviting international intervention. The need for a common platform to counter external pressure and evolve common strategies is therefore quite compelling and we are likely to see definite steps in this direction in the future.

The 'mistaken' bombing of the Chinese embassy in Yugoslavia by the

U.S. led to a strong anti-U.S. wave in China and a reassessment of the PRC's global strategy. The post Kosovo world is clearly a unipolar one, dominated by the U.S. which gives a new edge to the problem of hegemonism. A fresh impetus was thus provided to the process of creating new alliances and strengthening relationships since it was clearly beyond the capacity of any one single country to meet the emerging challenges. This has led to a renewed emphasis on India-China relations and their role in the global scenario. It is in this context that the revival of the India-China-Russia strategic alliance has to be understood.

Indo-Russian relations have generally been on an upswing in the post Cold War period with the Russians strongly supporting India's claim for permanent membership of the Security Council and the signing of agreements on the transfer of advanced technology and strengthening military ties. On the other hand, the Chinese and the Russians entered into a 'strategic partnership' in November 1998 during Jiang Zemin's visit to Russia. This was aimed at blocking 'the development of elements of confrontation in their relations, [and] encourage cooperation.' It was also sought to be made clear that this was not an alliance or aimed against third countries.

**I**t was in March 1999, during Russian Prime Minister Primakov's India visit, that the idea of a strategic alliance between India, China and Russia was mooted. At that point, neither China nor India responded positively. The post Kosovo situation saw the revival of this concept, which in any case had never been fleshed out properly and the contours of which have yet to take shape. The Chinese response this time round, at least at the unofficial levels, has been slightly different.

It cannot be denied though that the impetus for the alliance has been the recognition of the undoubtedly arrogant military offensive launched by the U.S. and the possibilities for intervention in their own backyards. There is a recognition by all three countries that this is indeed a unipolar moment in international relations. Despite the formal status of Russia and China in the United Nations, the ease with which the U.S. overrode all protest and virtually ignored these countries in launching its bombings, must undoubtedly have been a jolt, if not a shock.

**T**here is certainly no intention to antagonize the U.S. since all three countries have a huge stake in the maintenance of normal relations with the sole superpower. The Chinese have also consistently reiterated their 'peaceful, independent and non-allied foreign policy formulated by Deng Xiaoping.' Russia and India as well, no less than China, are in need of advanced technology and are dependent on aid from the U.S. dominated global financial and economic institutions. The relationship of each of these countries with the U.S. involves aspects of both 'contention and collusion', which is not easy to resolve. In fact, over the last year, all three had to face up to this duality in a major way.

Last June, Russia was in deep economic crisis and had to be bailed out with massive World Bank assistance. Clearly, this would not have been possible without U.S. concurrence. During the Kargil conflict, the U.S. prevailed upon Pakistan to bring an early end to what could easily have been for India (as also for Pakistan) an extremely long drawn and costly affair, both in terms of human casualties and hardware. And most recently, the agreement between the U.S. and China on the latter's entry to the WTO,

has seen the Chinese making wide ranging concessions to U.S. commercial interests, despite the friction between them over the bombing of their embassy. Many of these concessions are in fact related to issues on which the Chinese had long refused to compromise.

**E**ach of the three countries thus came up against situations which offered very little by way of alternatives, virtually forcing them to accept and reconcile with the enormous power and capability of the U.S. The proposed 'strategic alliance' will thus have to take into account this objective reality.

In all probability therefore, it will not be the strategic aspects of the alliance which will be the focus of initial discussions, and in the short term the three countries will be negotiating more in the bilateral mode. There would obviously be a more determined effort to explore economic exchanges, discuss the areas of common concern such as environmental problems; energy requirements, cross border terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism and possibilities of military cooperation. Efforts would also be directed towards projecting the relationship as an exercise in regional cooperation rather than as an emerging pole in the post Cold War world.

In addition to the objective reality of the global scenario, which imposes definite limits on this trilateral relationship, there are certain realities of the India-China relationship in particular which would act as constraining factors. For one, there does not appear to be any definite opinion in favour of such an alliance in either China or India, either at the official level or within the semi-official think tanks and research community. There seems to be at best a guarded sort of 'wait and watch' attitude.

Second, there are far too many hurdles in their relations which need to be sorted out before any shared strategic perspective, either at the global or regional level, can emerge. Moreover, China would at this point be extremely reluctant to appear on a common platform with India on the strategic situation in South Asia. Such a step would run counter to its policy of broad neutrality towards India and Pakistan, which was most recently in evidence during the Kargil conflict. Besides, the Chinese would never discard their 'time tested' relationship with Pakistan, particularly at a time when the nuclear factor has complicated power equations in the subcontinent. It cannot be denied, however, that the alliance of these three substantially independent powers could prove to be a major counter-vailing group, if the idea does get off the ground.

**D**espite the rather uneven and at times slow progress in sorting out problems, and the unfortunate ease with which suspicions and tensions seem to flare up, a realistic assessment of the manner in which new conditions and opportunities could be utilized, needs to be undertaken. The process of engaging the two countries at various levels and on as broad a front as possible should gather greater momentum. This would facilitate airing of doubts, continuous debates on wide ranging issues, and help enlarge areas and avenues of cooperation.

India-China relations in the years to come should make resolute attempts at shedding the baggage of the past. An unnecessary romanticizing of the past should be avoided. The positive aspects of earlier policies such as Panchsheel should be reiterated and refurbished with the new reality. There are miles to go and a realistic discourse would be the first step.

# India-Japan relations after Pokhran II

S. JAISHANKAR

IT is something of a paradox that India's relations with Japan, singularly free of any kind of dispute—ideological, cultural or territorial—should have been so severely affected by the nuclear tests of May 1998. If these ties had a character, it was one of warmth emanating from generous gestures and sentiments, of standing by each other at times of need.

Japan's image in India has historically been positive, going back to its 1905 victory over Russia which was interpreted by us as the beginning of Asian resurgence. In our reading of the events leading up to the Second World War, Japan's anti-colonial contribution overshadowed any reservations about its militarism. Japanese support and assistance to Netaji and the Indian National Army continue to shape popular thinking about Japan.

\* The author is a diplomat serving in Japan. The views expressed and assessments made in the article are entirely personal.

The immediate post independence experience was no less positive, with the Tokyo tribunal, waiving of reparations, conclusion of a separate Peace Treaty, the Asian Games, extension of yen loans and shared commitment to nuclear disarmament. This spirit was visible as late as 1991, in Japan's support during our balance of payments crisis.

Popular goodwill in both societies has been a notable element in the relationship. In Japan, it was not uncommon to hear politicians refer warmly to India's declaration of mourning at the time of the demise of the Showa Emperor. Japanese businessmen active in steel, textiles or trading are nostalgic as they recall their Indian connections during the reconstruction period. Even the varied sections of the intelligentsia saw much good in our society—the traditionalists foregrounded the source of Buddhism, the philosophers and academics a great intellectual tradition,

the post war centre-left admired the Nehruvian approach, while the right wing still kept alive memories of the INA. Surprisingly, the most pervasive Indian presence was gastronomic, through a Japanese concoction known as 'curry rice'.

**I**n the collective Indian perception, to the wartime image of a supportive Japan was added a strong admiration for that country's post war economic reconstruction and subsequent rapid growth. This was reaffirmed a generation later by the unique role of Maruti-Suzuki in revolutionising industrial technology and management concepts in pre-economic reform India. Somewhere in Indian thinking was embedded respect for a society which, in contrast to us, engaged the world on its own terms and preserved its unique character through a process of upheaval and change. The intuitive feeling about Japan was one of friendliness and it was not without reason that Japan consistently ranked as the most admired nation in Indian newspaper polls for a number of years.

That such an ostensibly harmonious relationship should founder on encountering its first significant obstacle calls for a reassessment of its basics. In hindsight, it would appear that the absence of problems in itself did not automatically contribute to adding substance to the ties. On the contrary, a friction free but non substantive relationship actually suffered from want of attention.

The unfortunate reality of the state of affairs between India and Japan was that over three decades neither side concretely built on the warm sentiments and good feelings. The compulsions of the Cold War and India's closed economy apparently led us much further away from each other than we realised. The Japanese judged India by the yardstick of mate-

rial progress, a criteria for their own self-evaluation, and found us wanting. Increasingly, India appeared to them like the proverbial samurai who despite an empty stomach, ostentatiously used a large toothpick in public. The initial Japanese regard for post independent India too was evidently diminished over time by our seemingly perpetual conflict with Pakistan, which in Japanese eyes only reduced our stature.

The normalisation of Sino-Japanese ties also led to a revaluation on the premium put on the India relationship till the 1970s. Its cumulative impact may be gauged from a high level interaction considerably lower than with other G-8 nations, in the 10 year gap between the visits of foreign ministers and prime ministers, the limited Japanese economic presence in India, an absence of frequent working level contacts between the governments with the associated networking, and in the minimal societal interaction which in turn led to a misreading of developments in India.

**M**oreover, as the Japanese economy emerged as the principal motor for economic growth in the Asia-Pacific and with Japan's growing relationship with the ASEAN, India gradually began to be excluded from the very definition of Asia. It was no accident that our entry into the Asean Regional Forum was pushed by nations other than Japan or that our case for participation in the ASEM receives less than a sympathetic hearing in Tokyo. In part, this emanated from Japan's historical experience which had its limits at the Arakan Hills.

A factor often overlooked in India is the dual character of Japan, identifying in part with Asia, but more often with the West with which Japan was much closer materially and ideologically. This duality, accentuated by

economic prosperity, has produced two post war generations who feel little affinity with a nation like India. At our end, growing unfamiliarity and an inability to keep pace with changes aggravated the basic incomprehension of an opaque society. Putting sentiment aside, the stark reality of 1998 was that India was less relevant to Japan's economy, its security, culture, even leisure and entertainment, than say the European Union.

**I**ronically, Pokhran II caught India-Japan relations at the very time when efforts were underway to repair the relative neglect of previous decades. India's economic reform had provided an opportunity, at long last, for greater Japanese investment to enter the country. Though characteristically, the Japanese response was deliberate and overly cautious, nonetheless by 1998 there was a visible upswing in economic ties.

FDI commitment in 1997 reached a peak of \$531.5 million, with actual inflows being about one-third the committed level. Big names of Japanese industry – Toyota, Honda, Sony, Mitsubishi, Matsushita, Fujitsu, YKK – were establishing their presence in India. MITI was taking a direct interest in fostering ties, the Keidanren had begun to get directly involved in the relationship, the largest financial newspaper *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* was actively promoting our economic reforms, Japanese banks, insurance and securities companies were waking up to the Indian market, and Japanese airlines (JAL and ANA) establishing direct flights to India.

At the political level too, shedding by now the unnecessary baggage of the Cold War, high level interaction had resumed with a MITI minister paying a first ever visit in 1995 and a foreign minister coming after a gap of a decade in 1997. India's engage-

ment with ASEAN fora allowed greater opportunity for discussion of larger political and security issues with Japan. There was even talk of the need for a bilateral security dialogue between the two countries, and the exchange of visits by the naval chiefs in 1997-98 broke new ground. Support sectors, such as science and technology, academic interaction and cultural exchanges were also showing signs of greater life.

**I**n the final analysis, however, we had still not made up for lost ground. Japanese FDI in India was less than 1% of its total global commitment, only 90,000 of the 16 million Japanese who travelled abroad each year chose to make India their destination; of 52,000 foreign students in Japan, Indians numbered less than 200! Each one of these indicators speaks for themselves. Most tellingly, even the occasion of Japan being the first partner nation from Asia for the India Engineering Trade Fair in February 1997 was not deemed good enough to warrant the presence of Prime Minister Hashimoto, despite a tradition of heads of states or governments being present at such occasions. Bilateral relations, therefore, were not a significant restraining factor as Japan's leaders contemplated a response to Pokhran II.

In the event, Japanese reaction to the Indian nuclear tests was surprisingly swift and exceptionally harsh. The Government of Japan announced, in two stages, what it described as 'economic measures'. These included freezing of grant aid for new projects (except for emergency, humanitarian and grassroots assistance), suspension of yen loans for new projects, withdrawal of Tokyo as a venue for the India Development Forum, a 'cautious examination' of loans to India by international financial institutions

and imposition of strict control over technology transfers. It should be noted that in contrast, only part of the grant aid to China was frozen when it tested in 1995.

The Japanese ambassador to India was recalled temporarily for consultations and Prime Minister Hashimoto, preparing to leave for the G-8 Summit at Birmingham, emphasised his determination to get the G-8 to send a clear and strong message against India's nuclear tests. These tests were described by the Japanese government as an intolerable challenge to international society. The Diet, for its part, went further and described the tests as acts of destruction of the global environment and ecosystem and constituting a threat to the survival of human beings. Japan followed up the 'economic measures' by cancelling a number of official dialogues, snapping communication at a time when it was most needed.

**T**he reaction of the Japanese public, the media and civic organisations too was one of anger and outrage, understandable if one accepts their self-perception of having a moral position against nuclear weapons and tests. What was significant was that the Japanese government not only made no effort to check public reaction, but by being entirely dismissive of India's national security concerns, added to its intensity. A closely networked society was not slow in picking up the political signals. Public reaction has always featured as an important element in Japanese policy making. But by selectively picking out elements of public perception such as opposition to nuclear tests while conveniently ignoring strong feelings about the US nuclear umbrella and the P-5's evasion of their disarmament obligations, the Japanese government has allowed itself to be seen as using pub-

lic opinion to advance its own particular agenda.

To most Indians, the Japanese reaction was not unexpected, even if not wholly acceptable. It was after all the land of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the only case of nuclear weapons actually being used in war. The emotional side of India felt that if there was one country which had a moral right to raise its voice against nuclear weapons and tests, it was Japan. The intellectual side, however, noted that Japan had in the past been singularly inconsistent in doing so. It noted too that Japan had successfully harmonised its domestic anti nuclear sentiment with its national security requirements through a security alliance with the United States.

**C**ertainly, from a non Japanese perspective, the convoluted semantic exercises which successive Japanese governments indulged in to overlook the presence of nuclear forces on their territory, were difficult to reconcile with claims of moral leadership on the nuclear question. Its enthusiastic advocacy of the discriminatory Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty did not sit well with a society with an anti colonial history. Japan's rationalisation of subcritical tests in the context of the CTBT detracted from its independence of position. And its claim that India's tests would encourage nations in its own region to follow suit seemed to fly in the face of established facts.

But, as viewed by the Japanese themselves, they as a nation were victims of a unique experience which placed them in a special position. Moreover they had given up the right to make nuclear weapons despite possessing the capability to do so. It is conceivable that Japan's reaction, however critical, may have been received better in India had it not been complicated by the vehemence of a



Japanese international campaign targeting India, its determined equation of India with Pakistan, and its self-appointed role in respect of Jammu and Kashmir.

The intensity with which Japan led an international campaign against India's nuclear tests is best encapsulated by Prime Minister Hashimoto's position taken at the G-8 summit in Birmingham, where he was quoted as stating that countries that obey international community rules should be rewarded while those that do not should be punished. When the G-8 foreign ministers met subsequently in London, the Japanese took the initiative to set up a South Asia Task Force to coordinate pressure on India and Pakistan. Subsequently, Japan has been among the more active members of the SATF.

It was Japan again, along with Sweden, Costa Rica and Slovenia, which introduced what was to eventually become UN Security Council Resolution 1172, strongly deploring the nuclear tests by India and Pakistan, calling on the two countries not to assemble or deploy nuclear devices, cease development of ballistic missiles, and immediately and unconditionally sign the NPT and CTBT. Revealingly, the initial Japanese draft was much more strongly worded and referred, amongst others, to the need for a mutually acceptable solution that address the root cause of tensions, including Kashmir. Japan also issued an appeal to the P-5 foreign ministers' meeting in Geneva not to grant nuclear weapon state status to India and Pakistan.

At the Asean Regional Forum, Japan unsuccessfully pressed for the participation of Pakistan (which was not a member) arguing that in view of the fact that India was already in the ARF, an invitation to Pakistan would

be desirable. At the International Atomic Energy Agency, Japan joined Australia, Canada and New Zealand in criticising our nuclear tests at the Board of Governors' meeting as also at the General Conference. It proposed that the acceptance of IAEA's comprehensive safeguards be made a criteria for the implementation of the agency's activities, including the technical cooperation programme. Even at the Inter Parliamentary Union meeting in Moscow in September 1998, it was Japan which sought (unsuccessfully) the inclusion of an agenda item protesting against the South Asian nuclear tests.

The Tokyo Forum on Non Proliferation and Disarmament, constituted by the Government of Japan immediately after our nuclear tests, was the most recent step in the international campaign. Its final report released on 25 July 1999, calls on the international community to continue to urge India and Pakistan to implement all requirements in UNSC Resolution 1172. It considers that the two countries should acquire no special status under the NPT, let alone legal status as nuclear weapon states, nor be rewarded with any other additional status as a result of their nuclear testing. Its key recommendations envisage the reversal of proliferation in South Asia and refer as well to the resolution of the Kashmir dispute in the nuclear context. The Indian participant at the forum withdrew after the initial meeting on finding that his views were not being taken into account.

The equation of India with Pakistan in many of these Japanese initiatives is *per se* disturbing to the former, seen as a carryover of the western Cold War balance of power approach to the subcontinent. Japan, over the years, has followed it assiduously, matching

for example every visit to India with one to Pakistan. In the nuclear context, this balancing acquires special meaning because it pointedly ignores the critical external assistance received by Pakistan in both its nuclear and missile programmes. What made the situation particularly galling was the linkage sought to be drawn between the nuclear tests and the Jammu and Kashmir issue, reflected in the Japanese subscription to and advancement of a 'nuclear flash point' theory.

The first sign of bringing Jammu and Kashmir into the nuclear debate came with Prime Minister Hashimoto's statement on 29 May 1998 that he had done his best to place the issue of Kashmir on the Security Council agenda, thinking that this was the only way to ensure Pakistan's restraint, but the reaction (of other members) was not swift.

On 1 June 1998, then Foreign Minister Obuchi, responding to a question about settling the Kashmir dispute at the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Lower House, spoke of inviting the concerned countries to Tokyo to help find a way out as a solution to this historical dispute. Both Hashimoto and Obuchi specifically referred to the international community's interest in Kashmir while speaking at Nikkei's 'Future of Asia Conference' on 4-5 June 1998. The Japanese official spokesman, in various pronouncements during that period, projected the Kashmir problem as the 'underlying cause' of the nuclear tests and went to the extent of referring to a Tokyo Conference on Kashmir. References to a role for Japan as a facilitator continued well into August 1998.

The experience of this period raises a number of questions which have a bearing on the future of India-Japan relations. First and foremost,

there is a clear message that our bilateral ties do not constitute an adequate counterweight to restrain Japan on an issue of significant concern. Adding substance to these ties should, therefore, constitute one of our immediate priorities. Second, the language of demands, rewards and punishments, benchmarks and so on, is reflective of a donor syndrome at its worst, a departure from the earlier history of good sentiments or with the Indian belief in mutuality of interests. Presumably, the fallout of this approach is apparent by now. The nuclear issue is, of course, being addressed on a forum larger than the bilateral one and its full resolution will take some time. But the insistence on equating India with Pakistan at every opportunity is reflective of an era gone by and does not bode well for the future. Japan must be encouraged to outgrow this paradigm.

**T**he foray into the Jammu and Kashmir debate is, however, really the most inexplicable element. It could have been reasonably expected that given Japan's own territorial disputes, there would have been some sensitivity for similar concerns of others. The suggestion of mediation or even facilitation emanating from a source so entirely innocent of the complexities of the Indian subcontinent is extraordinary. What really brought out the lack of understanding was the surprise on the Japanese side at the vehemence of India's reaction to its new position on Jammu and Kashmir. A closer dialogue at the political and security level is, therefore, an imperative for this relationship.

Even as relations began to show some improvement in the first half of 1999, the Japanese position on Kargil provided confirmation, if one was needed, that the attitudinal changes necessary for a stronger relationship are still only in the making. Briefly,

the Japanese approach put India and Pakistan on par, ignoring the central fact that the Line of Control had been violated, thereby projecting the issue in terms of a larger dispute rather than a unilateral violation of a mutually agreed upon line. This was justified on the grounds that who triggered off what in this dispute was not easy for Japan to comment on. Lack of evidence and absence of means of verification were cited as reasons not to pass judgement. One can reasonably infer that this was perceived as a neutral approach, and when accompanied by calls for self-restraint and cessation of hostilities, expected to meet with international approval.

In the event, Japan found itself out of step even with the G-8, giving rise to a speculation inimical to promoting bilateral understanding. One result of the international response to the Kargil episode was to upset the long standing India-Pakistan balance syndrome; this does not appear to have gone down well in Tokyo.

**B**y the second half of 1999, the Japanese approach towards India's nuclear policy appeared to be undergoing a reassessment. The initial G-8 consensus arrived at in May-June 1998 had begun eroding. India's relations with China too had visibly improved. The action of the U.S. Senate was a setback to a country that had taken on the mission of seeing through the ratification of the CTBT. On the ground, there was little give on India's insistence on maintaining a credible minimum nuclear deterrent. The sanctions were not yielding the desired results, and in fact, appeared to be affecting Pakistan much more than India. The Indian general elections brought no new factor into the calculus.

Apart from the aspect of viability, there was an element of desirability as well. The goodwill element in

the relationship, taken for granted for so long, was showing signs of fraying. Moreover, the sanctions were not without some cost to the sanctioning government in the absence of similar policies on the part of other nations.

**T**he mutual desire for normalcy in the relationship, therefore, began reasserting itself more strongly. Cancelled dialogues were restored, the Jammu and Kashmir issue was now depicted as a misunderstanding, and high level political contacts resumed. On the Japanese side, India's signing the CTBT remains a major issue. From the Indian perspective, the shadow of sanctions continue to overhang the relationship. But it is clear that neither country wishes to reduce the relationship to a single issue. Their recent determination to agree on a forward looking agenda reflects a common interest in putting a difficult phase behind them.

If we are to analyse this period, not in a spirit of recrimination or with a desire to obfuscate events but to learn lessons for the future, some good may still come of it. It could be argued that this phase of difficult relations was really a mixed blessing. For all its downside, it provided a much needed reality check which, by briefly stripping our ties of false sentiment, allowed for a serious engagement, perhaps for the first time. The problem with India-Japan relations is that they have been starved of attention; this they are now getting in full measure on both sides. The state of ties post Pokhran II allow us the opportunity to fashion new terms of engagement.

There is a need for a better appreciation of the mutuality of interests. This will probably happen in any case once we broadbase the relationship and move away from its overwhelming ODA character. If only for that rea-

son, a greater focus on encouraging Japanese FDI is required on our part. The second core issue relates to an appropriate recognition of each others' security interests. Japan must accept that Indian security concerns go beyond the confines of South Asia. It is, of course, for the Japanese to determine and appropriately formulate their own requirements. But in any case, it is difficult to envisage any clash of interests in this regard.

**U**ltimately, what is important is that the underlying sentiment should be one of convergence rather than of competition. Healthy bilateral relations will have a natural downstream flow in terms of international cooperation. India and Japan have a number of shared interests, among them the reform of the United Nations.

Even the nuclear issue is not as intractable as it may appear at first glance. Time will reassure Japan that there is no automatic spread effect to the Indian nuclear tests and that its own immediate security environment is not adversely affected. Nor need there be any apprehension about the intentions or even ambitions of a nuclear India. Recent history has frequently demonstrated Japan's pragmatism and there is no reason to suppose that this would not extend to India. Some influential Japanese are already arguing that India's nuclear weapons programme should lead to greater transparency and self-restraint on the part of China. It is only natural that a new factor, however disturbing initially, would be put to best use as Japan assesses its own security environment. On our side, clearly we must remedy our failure to adequately communicate the full complexity of our security concerns.

Japan and India are both in the process of globalising, each of course in their own way and responding to

their individual compulsions. Whether or not we are fully cognisant of the long term implications of the road we have chosen, there can be little argument that most of us have an inadequate feel for the changes currently underway in Japan. Our picture of that society, its concerns and its moving forces, is still very much frozen in the past. Japanese corporations today are increasingly accepting the need for global partnerships. Key sectors of the economy, such as banking, securities, energy, health, telecom and so on are opening up. The current recession should not obscure a reform and restructuring designed to maintain and even enhance Japan's competitiveness. At the societal level, there is a very marked internationalisation, visible in language, in food and dress habits, and in leisure activities. Most important, the political 'coming out' of Japan has begun.

**I**ncreasing participation in peace-keeping operations and a higher profile in international organisations are only the first step. More significant, sensitive issues kept pending for half a century such as the status of the national flag and anthem, are now being decisively addressed. There is much greater realism about meeting security challenges and a much stronger will in securing national goals. As with most processes in Japan, this one too will be incremental until the final quantum leap.

For us there is a clear message: Japan will inevitably be a larger political, economic and cultural presence in the world, and particularly so in Asia. Japan too must give more thought to where India would be 15 to 20 years hence and plan a relationship keeping that in mind. This time around, mutual interest demands that we engage each other more substantially and more productively.

# Sino-Japan relations and India

YUSUF REHAN RAHMAN

JAPAN'S links with China are both historic and cultural. Buddhism came to Japan via China and even the script that modern Japanese uses locates its origins in China. Though it is not within the scope of this article to trace the historical political and cultural links with China, some examples from recent Japanese history might be necessary to acquaint the reader with the imperatives that shape and influence the Japan-China relationship today.

In 1867 the abolishment of the Shogunate and the accession to the throne of the 15 year-old Mutsuhito, who became the Emperor Meiji, started Japan's bold step forward towards the 20th century long before the 19th had ended. China had by then become a playground for European

powers and was of considerable interest to the Japanese.

In 1881 Kotaru Hiraoka founded the Genyosha or the Black Ocean Society with the professed aim 'to honour the imperial family', 'respect the empire' and 'guard the rights of the people'. The Genyosha also had a deep and abiding interest in China. They shaped public and private opinion on China and represented the views of the establishment. Within a few years several societies had sprung up with aims (i.e. of expanding Japanese influence overseas, mainly in China and Korea, and acquiring intelligence from them and Russia) similar to the Genyosha. By 1898 most of these societies had amalgamated to form the East Asia One Culture Society.

By 1882 Mitsuru Toyama, one of the leading members of the Black Ocean Society (who was later to almost adopt Rash Behari Bose in Japan), had around a hundred men collecting information about China, and more specifically the Chinese secret societies. By the late 1880s, he was not only supplying the Japanese government with intelligence information but was also carrying out tasks in China for the Japanese army.

**T**he effectiveness of the Japanese attempts to infiltrate Chinese political institutions and those shaping them is best illustrated by the first real historical record of the time. Hiraya Amané, a radical intellectual who established contacts with Chinese revolutionaries, wrote the *Zhong Guo Bi – Mi She-Hui Shi*, a record about the triads and similar organisations. Also, many Chinese revolutionaries working against Kang Yu-Wei and Liang Ch'i-Ch'ao sought exile in Japan where they were supported by societies like the Genyosha. By 1895 Japan had won its war against China and not only exacted heavy compensation but also annexed Formosa and won rights to develop mines and construct railways in Manchuria.

It would be dangerous to merely impute imperialistic motives to the Japanese interests in China. Policy makers in the Japanese government and the people who influenced them were on the right on some issues and strongly leftist on others. The China lobby of the government held two broad views. One section held the view that a unified China cooperating with Japan was in their best interests. The other believed that Manchuria and part of the northern territories of China should be an area of Japanese influence, and were quite happy to leave the rest of China under Sun Yat Sen.

To properly understand the motives underlying Japan's policy in China one needs to understand the spirit of liberalism that developed in Japan in the latter part of the 19th century. This spirit of liberalism genuinely lay behind the Japanese wish to help its neighbours in the Far East, such as China, which Japan believed had been exploited by western powers. Later, the desire to help these neighbouring countries was seized upon by the nationalists to extend Japanese influence in the region. Unfortunately, however, the entire exercise degenerated into empire building and alienated the very forces desiring Japan to play a leading role in the revitalisation of Asian countries.

**J**apan's role in Asian affairs from the latter part of the 19th century to the end of the Second World War is well documented and need not be elaborated here. At the end of the war, Japan was a shattered country and every aspect of the country had to be rebuilt. One feature of the rebuilding that took place after WWII was that the resulting shape of things, be it was government policy or society, was very different from pre-war precedents.

Japan had no official relations with China from 1945 to 1972. However, people like Sionji Kinkazhu who lived in China in a private capacity, playing the role of an unofficial ambassador, were important in furthering an unofficial exchange of views and positions between the two countries.

In the coming years trade was to become a key element of the political and the strategic relationship between China and Japan. In the early '60s Zhou Enlai, for political reasons, had sought to diversify China's economic links away from Moscow. Zhou initiated a programme where Japanese companies designated as 'friendly' were permitted to trade with China.

Japanese policy during this same time focused on building a stable relationship with their giant and sometimes belligerent neighbour by separating politics from economics.

Official relations between the two countries were re-established in 1972. The political rise of Deng Xiaoping and the economic reforms he initiated bode well for Sino-Japan relations. In 1978 the two countries signed a Long Term Trade Agreement and a Treaty of Peace and Friendship.

**A**lthough an unofficial five year trade agreement had been signed in 1962, trade between the two countries had not really picked up till after the signing of the trade agreement and friendship treaty in 1978. As part of this agreement, Japan agreed to buy 10 billion dollars worth of oil and coal from China. An equal amount was to be paid in the form of providing industrial plants (mainly in iron, steel and petrochemical industries), technology and construction equipment. The long term trade agreement effectively paved the way for a wave of contracts between Japanese companies and China. Finally, the Japanese government provided soft loans to cover China's purchases from Japanese companies.

By 1985, despite steady improvement in economic relations, political relations had reached a low for two reasons: the visit to the Yasukuni shrine by the then Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone, and the revised language in Japanese school textbooks dealing with Japanese atrocities in China. Also by the mid 1980s China was experiencing a particularly large trade deficit with Japan. Student demonstrations in China railed against Japanese militarism and economic imperialism. The then Communist Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang, who was perceived as

being pro Japan, also became the target of criticism of the anti Japan lobby.

These events clearly showed a great deal of residual hostility towards Japan that could be easily inflamed. Also, Japanese public attitudes towards its war history were shown to be capable of offending the sensibilities of the Chinese as well as other Asian countries. Nevertheless, the problems of the '80s were checked by both the Chinese and Japanese governments and the earlier momentum to improve the relationship was maintained. However, despite the efforts of the governments, Japanese investors remained cautious about investing in China and the Chinese actively sought business partners in economies other than Japan.

**T**he Tiananmen massacre was a significant event in the China-Japan relationship. The Japanese response was muted compared to that of most western countries. Ultimately though Japan condemned the Chinese government's crackdown on the pro democracy movement and withheld its third loan package to China.

In 1990, however, Japan announced that it would resume lending to China despite western criticism. Japanese Prime Minister, Toshiki Kaifu visited China in 1991 and confirmed that Tiananmen was no longer an obstacle to improving and developing the relationship between the two countries. Subsequently, the Japanese business community started pouring investment in China and the Japanese Emperor visited China in 1992. By 1993, the Japanese had acknowledged responsibility for war with China and apologised for their actions.

The Japanese handling of the Tiananmen incident and their subsequent actions, including the declaration that the Japan-China relationship was as important as the US-Japan

relationship, created a favourable impression in China and relations between the two countries reached a new high. However, issues like nuclear testing by China, the attitude of certain sections in the Japanese establishment towards the Japanese responsibility for the war, and the complicated issue of the relationship with Taiwan continued to dog their bilateral relationship.

**I**n 1995, Japanese Prime Minister Tomichi Murayama and the Chinese President Jiang Zemin held talks at the APEC summit in Osaka. From this time on relations have more or less been on an even keel and the relationship is gradually heading towards becoming a mature one.

China also sought and received considerable, though not unequivocal, support from Japan for its entry into the WTO. From Japan's perspective, China's entry into the WTO was necessary for protecting Japan's growing economic stake. At present the economic relationship enjoys strong support from all quarters in both China and Japan and the bilateral trade is worth more 65 billion dollars.

In evaluating the Sino-Japanese relationship it would be incorrect to project trends merely on the basis of the published facts and figures. A strong and mutually supportive relationship is viewed in official quarters and certain sections of the public as being not only a necessary corrective to what happened in the latter part of the last and the first half of this century, but also as a strategic imperative. Many commentators have drawn parallels between Sino-Japanese relationship and the post WWII relationship that developed between the United States and Britain after a century of antagonism.

There has been a perceptible shift in Japanese policy giving Asian

affairs their due significance. This shift in policy has come about for three reasons. First is the increasing economic importance of East Asia and China. Second, political tolerance for further Japanese penetration of the U.S. and European markets is reaching its limits. Finally, and most importantly, there has been a basic rethink in the Look West policy that Japan followed since the days of Fukuzawa Yukichi to catch up technologically with the West.

Current estimates indicate that by the year 2015 the volume of China-Japan trade will outstrip that between the U.S. and Japan. Continuing economic growth and political stability in China, leading to greater economic integration with Japan, will further contribute to the strengthening of the Sino-Japanese relationship.

Although China and Japan are clearly heading towards a mutual economic partnership, it is less recognized, though in my opinion quite plausible, that they are really moving in the next 10 to 15 years towards a more comprehensive partnership encompassing more than only economic issues. Leaders like Mahathir of Malaysia are already prodding Japan to take a more active role in Asian affairs. It is inconceivable that such an active role could come about without the understanding and support of the Chinese.

**W**hat role does India intend to play in Asia? How does it intend to integrate itself in the evolving dynamism of Asia? (I use the word dynamism despite the recent problems experienced by countries in the region.) How do we perceive the growing proximity of Japan and China, which might well evolve into a strategic partnership and is likely to have a major impact on India's position in Asia? These are questions that must

be asked but have not really been answered.

India's reaction to the developments in Asia, whether those in the Korean peninsula, or ASEAN, or to the developing Sino-Japan relationship, make it apparent that nowhere has India taken a proactive position and the above questions have not been seriously considered. Despite its best efforts India has not made any substantial breakthroughs in its relationship with Japan, China or even ASEAN. Are we missing the Asian bus? I believe we are.

**L**et us take the case of India's relationship with Japan, a country situated at the core of so many issues directly or indirectly in Asia. Unlike the Sino-Japanese relationship which evolved step by step over a 20 year period with emphasis on structural reform of the Chinese economy (although much remains to be done) to facilitate Japanese (and other) investments, India has enjoyed little success in its diplomatic and political dialogue with Japan. The fundamental point that has been missed is that Japanese investments will not flow into India and nor will political convergence occur in a significant way until India shows the requisite political will to integrate into and appreciate the political nuances and economic convergence occurring in Asia. Without India demonstrating its commitment to structural reform of the economy and paying attention to developments in the rest of Asia, Indo-Japanese ties will remain as cordial and as unspectacular as they are today.

Even if India appreciates the above it has been only a diplomatic and economic bystander to much of what has been happening in the Asian region. Although much is made of the cultural links between India and Japan and India's dissenting opinion in the

war crimes tribunal in Tokyo, little has actually been done to alleviate or accommodate Japanese concerns and views. Little has been done to improve the poor infrastructure (even in cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai and Calcutta), the inefficiency of the administrative bodies, the high interest rates, the tariff and excise structure, or create an investor friendly exit policy – areas which have all been foregrounded by the Japanese at various levels at different times as being impediments to investing in India.

The Japanese have also stressed the need to broaden ties between India and Japan to issues beyond the economic. This would require an attempt at harmonising India's diplomatic and economic initiatives with Japanese views of the important issues in Asia.

**I**t must be clarified that when we speak of India's position we are not only looking at the diplomatic and other initiatives of the government in power but for a broadbased consensus on Asian issues cutting across party lines. A consensus akin to the one that Indian policy on the United States enjoys, where the details may be different but the general framework is by and large understood by the main political parties.

What is India's stance vis-à-vis the idea of an Asian Monetary Fund or that of a common currency in Asia – themes that are increasingly being discussed in various circles in Japan? What role would India play in such a fund, even vis-à-vis the idea of a common currency? These issues have not been actively debated in official circles that matter – in academia, in print or any other media. Do we have a framework to deal with such issues? Can India afford to ignore them and still expect to be a part of a resurgent Asia?

Let us not forget that despite the current economic crisis in East Asia,

China, mainly because of ASEAN and Japanese concerns, has successfully resisted the devaluation of its currency. This is not an insignificant pointer to the fact that despite differences in political systems there is an undercurrent of seeing issues in the larger Asian context.

**A**t the last ASEAN summit meeting in Manila, its leaders met with the prime ministers of China and Japan and the president of South Korea. This was their third meeting in as many years. This meeting was as Rodolfo Severino, the Secretary General of ASEAN, pointed out, 'an indication of the general convergence of purpose in East Asia.' Can India afford to ignore this convergence of purpose and stand isolated from the processes that further it? We do so at the risk of becoming an irrelevant bystander in an increasingly important (both economically and politically) region of the world.

Japan's improvement of relations with China came about not only because of its geostrategic position vis-à-vis China where a stable and prosperous China was deemed essential for its security but also because China is a crucial cog in so many wheels in Asia. The lessons of the Chinese backed insurgencies in Malaysia and Indonesia and an unstable Kampuchea threatening Thailand were well taken into consideration by the Japanese in diplomatically, politically and economically engaging China.

Similarly, India too must justify its relevance to Asia in a pragmatic and positive way (and concentrate on the important issues of improving infrastructure, reducing tariffs and so on) in order to engage the Japanese sufficiently so that Japanese investment in India reaches levels comparable to that in China.

# Our eastern neighbour

JASJIT SINGH

BOTH to understand our interests and to chart a future policy toward our neighbours requires us to rethink what conventional wisdom defines as our region. The unquestioning adoption of 'South Asia' as our region over the decades has deprived us of a complete and balanced perspective of our immediate neighbourhood, leave alone the region immediately beyond, which might impact on our interests and future policy. For example, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan had a direct major adverse impact on our security, the after-effects of which continue to be felt more than a decade after the Soviet withdrawal and collapse.

The term 'South Asia' seems to have appeared in the late 1950s, linked to the emergence of US-sponsored western military alliances that divided Asia into Southeast and West Asia (later modified in the late 1970s to also superimpose Southwest Asia). The Washington-centred worldview imagined a world where the Indian subcontinent simply disappeared at the edges of peripheral vision. The term South Asia was convenient from their perspective. But what we failed to grasp was the damage this simple

definition of the region has done to our neighbours and us.

Look for example at the sheer geographical nonsense where South Asia so defined does not include three of our very important physical neighbours: China, Afghanistan and Myanmar! Our borders (a significant part of which are disputed) cover nearly 7,000 km out of the total of 16,000 km of our land frontiers. Over 94,000 sq km of Northeast India is claimed by (not to mention another 60,000 sq km in Northwest India occupied by) China that is not considered to be a South Asian country. Geographically, Srinagar is north of Lhasa. The chain of Andamans islands is closer to Indonesia and Thailand than the Indian mainland.

There is a more serious problem created by this definition. The Indian subcontinent has a common civilisational history, heritage and integrity associated with India because of its being the largest inheritor of that civilisation. But the subcontinent now has a number of sovereign states of which, at least, Pakistan tries to define its heritage more in terms of religion rather than civilisation.



Emphasising South Asia as a region only underlines a value threat from Indian civilisation with a tradition of assimilation and absorption. At the same time, the tremendous asymmetry between India and its South Asian neighbours—in size, population, economy, and so on—creates a distorted picture. None of the South Asian countries are neighbours to each other while each of them is contiguous to India. More often than not, India is seen only in relation to the second-largest South Asian country, Pakistan. Perceptions get further distorted because Indian concerns and interests do not receive adequate notice, especially since many of them relate to immediate neighbours who are not seen as part of 'South Asia'.

One consequence of this perception has been a tendency by Indians to pay far less attention to China and Myanmar than necessary. Myanmar went into self-imposed isolation for a number of decades. In recent times, Myanmar has been associated with Aung San Suu Kyi, admired for her struggle for democracy. But the government in Rangoon (now called Yangon) had progressively failed to ensure even the minimum semblance of governance. The military takeover in 1988 reversed the process of lawlessness and put Myanmar on the road to recovery.

Many of the ethnic and separatist movements, which had prospered in the region outside the Irrawaddy valley, were brought into a framework of reconciliation and submission. But, unlike the earlier period, the international community now sought to isolate Myanmar because of the military rule, and the regime sought engagement with the external world while it grappled with the problems within.

For the first four years, at least, India was highly critical of the new

regime. China on the other hand moved rapidly to support the new regime with aid, assistance and weapons. Southeast Asia, especially the ASEAN, soon realised the importance of engaging the government in Yangon and admitted Myanmar into the expanded ASEAN in the face of objections from the United States and some of its allies. It was also clear by 1992 that the regime was stable and that the pro democracy movement, limited primarily to student groups in Yangon, would not be able to force a change.

With a regime that was able to exercise control over the border regions of Myanmar, the picture for India started to change. For decades India had faced the problem of separatist insurgency movements finding sanctuary across the border in Myanmar. The Burmese Communist Party, backed by Communist China, had supported Naga insurgency for nearly two decades since the mid 1950s. The government in Yangon indicated its willingness to cooperate with India in controlling separatist activity across the border. This set the framework for expanding cooperation between India and Burma since the early 1990s. There are a number of issues of strategic significance that guide common interests in this regard.

India is bracketed by two of the world's three largest narcotics producing-exporting regions. There are indications that the narcotics traffic, from what is euphemistically referred to as the 'Golden Triangle' encompassing Myanmar-Thailand-Laos, constitutes the major source of illicit heroin and opium, although it has shown decline in recent years. Willy-nilly India became a passage country (directly and via Nepal) and some, if not most, of the crime and violence in our North-eastern region is linked to this factor.

Historically, the British introduced opium into Burma in the late 19th century to increase supplies for its trade with China. The American CIA encouraged the production of opium in this region to finance its KMT allies in China and ethnic groups in Myanmar.<sup>1</sup> There were accusations of official involvement in the drug trade. But Myanmar has taken serious and significant measures to control the menace with noticeable success even beyond the liquidation of the activities of the notorious drug baron, Khun Sa. The area under opium cultivation in Myanmar came down from 161,012 hectares in 1991 to 130,300 hectares in 1998 although this itself represents nearly 90% of the production of opium in Southeast Asia.<sup>2</sup> But a great deal remains to be accomplished. Our interests require increased cooperation with Myanmar to ensure that the drug menace is controlled and eliminated.

As long as Myanmar was isolated from the external world there were few incentives for India to seek a closer relationship, especially since the earlier regimes had not been positively inclined. But its progressive opening up after 1989 has provided opportunities that go beyond the problem of narcotics. The expansion of Chinese influence in Myanmar is an obvious factor. China has supplied weapons for the re-equipment and expansion of the Myanmar military since 1989; it has also been deeply involved in economic and trade cooperation. It has provided assistance in building and strengthening infrastructure in the country. However, what

1. The CIA did the same in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region in cooperation with Pakistan since the late 1970s.

2. *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, 1998* by The Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, US Department of State, Washington DC, March 1999.

attracted most attention in India was the upgradation of ports, especially at Hyanggi and the communications facilities at Coco Island in the Bay of Bengal, a mere 45 kilometres from Indian territory. While Myanmar has tried to reassure India that these are not targeted against India and are for non-military purposes without any obligation to China despite Chinese presence there, concerns about the future implications for security persist. When seen in the context of larger China-Myanmar relations, with Myanmar's increasing dependency on China in economic terms as well as for weapons, these developments require careful consideration.

**C**hina's economic and trade relations have allowed its influence to grow significantly during the past decade. The Chinese see Myanmar as a route for Southwest China to the ocean and the world beyond for trade and economic relations. The distance to a port from Kunming or Chengdu, for example, is much shorter through Myanmar than through the overland route in China. Many in India have expressed concerns about the growing dependence of Myanmar on China. Though at present, there is little reason to doubt the Chinese who claim that their intentions are commercial and not political in nature, the long term strategic implications cannot be ignored. Armies have marched across from India into China on the Burma Road; theoretically they could also march southward. For the present though, plans to revamp the old Burma Road seem to have been shelved. But such an eventuality would remove a major limitation on China in its deployment of forces that exist along the Himalayan frontier in any possible military confrontation with India.

Others in India have expressed concern about the Chinese Navy's

future presence in the Indian Ocean and the port expansions have to be seen in this context. It is difficult to identify any serious military or political purpose that would be achieved by such a measure by China that would threaten Indian interests. However, the key factor of a growing Chinese influence to our east deserves attention, especially since China has established a strategic alliance with Pakistan on the other side.

**T**he very fact that Myanmar is an important neighbour with a 1,700 km long and difficult (for both) land border, and for other reasons, requires that we develop a closer relationship. This process has been underway in recent years. In fact cooperation between the security forces of both countries for better border management is now a well-established fact. Trade too has begun to grow although it is handicapped by vested interests in cross-border smuggling that has been especially lucrative because of the drug traffic. Though high level visits have taken place, political level visits have lagged.

It is extremely important for us to remain deeply engaged with countries to our east. The key for building such cooperative engagement is through economic and trade relations. This assumes greater importance in the context of a critical need for developing our Northeast region. Bangladesh and Myanmar are among the least developed countries, and their development must be seen as an important national strategic interest for us. Otherwise migration from Bangladesh and smuggling (including of narcotics and weapons) from Myanmar will continue with long term negative implications for our development and security.

In the mid 1980s, Chinese scholars had argued for exploiting the

potential of a China-Myanmar-Northeast India 'growth triangle'. More recently, a major international conference held in Kunming re-emphasised this. We, of course, cannot accept the formulation in its present form. The growth triangle will have to be between the countries concerned, even though in reality the operative results would focus on the nearest regions. Regional cooperation under various organisations such as the ASEAN (of which India is a dialogue partner), ARF and IORARC would further reinforce bilateral cooperation. The setting up of BIMSTEC (Bangladesh-India-Myanmar-Sri Lanka-Thailand Economic Cooperation organisation) has already signalled such an approach and India's intention and plans to build multilateral regional cooperation. Oil and gas reserves in Myanmar and the new discoveries of natural gas in Bangladesh promise to dramatically alter regional economic cooperation opportunities in the coming years.

**I**ndia is deficient in energy. Its import dependency on crude oil has increased from around 30% in the mid 1990s to reach an expected figure of over 90% during the coming decade. Industrial growth requires an energy demand increase of nearly 6% per year for the next two decades. India offers a huge market not only for energy imports from Bangladesh and Myanmar, but also for manufactured goods from these countries. India would need to invest in setting up industry in these countries. Trade and transit through Bangladesh would significantly enhance such economic relations to the mutual benefit of the countries involved. One hopes that those in Bangladesh opposed to the concept would see the benefit, rather than continue in the self-defeating anti-India mould.

# Globalization, India and East Asia

CHIRANJIB SEN

SINCE the economic reforms began, influential voices have called for an intensification of India's economic relations with the Asia-Pacific region, in particular East Asia. It seemed natural that a globalizing India should forge strong economic ties with her dynamic Asian neighbours. However, with the Asian economic crisis, these ideas moved to the backburner. But now there are signs that the crisis is over, with several countries such as S. Korea once again demonstrating their resilience. A reconsideration of India's economic participation with East Asia may therefore be appropriate at this juncture. In this paper, to keep the discussion tractable, we shall focus on the prospects of bilateral economic relations between India and S. Korea. The general logic of our analysis can be extended to other countries in the region.

In forming expectations about the future, it is important to keep in

view the interplay of the two main determinants of international economic relations—*market forces* and *economic policy*. Global market forces are pushing in the direction of closer integration. Among the key drivers of this process is the need for countries and enterprises to find new markets for their exports, the efficiency seeking restructuring of global operations being undertaken by multinational enterprises, and the eagerness of global finance capital to enter 'emerging markets'. Under these influences, trade-GDP ratios are rising in many countries, including India.

In the Asian region, market conditions have been disrupted by the recent financial crisis. The post-crisis recovery patterns in the economies of the region need to be analyzed in order to gauge their impact on future market trends that would impact India's economic links with this region. Though market processes

have become more important during the 1990s, the role of economic policy remains crucial, because it sets the parameters within which market forces may operate. We must therefore evaluate the *type of international integration strategy* that India is pursuing. Similarly, we need to evaluate the international economic strategies of East Asian countries. The closeness of fit between these strategies would determine the trade complementarity between India and East Asia. Should our integration strategy change, this would have significant implications for the nature of economic linkages.

**T**he fact that there are very different ways in which newly liberalizing economies can choose to integrate with international markets is often not adequately recognized. We shall distinguish between three generic types of integration strategies or 'modes of globalization'. In our view, this captures the essential choices before India. We shall call them: (Mode 1) Neutral-Gradualist Integration Strategy; (Mode 2) Dynamic Comparative Advantage Seeking Integration Strategy, and (Mode 3) Deep Integration Strategy. Each of these modes of globalization differs from the other in the relative emphasis it accords to the following dimensions of international linkage: (a) the stimulus to static comparative advantage, (b) long term technology and productivity enhancement, (c) intra-industry trade, and (d) FDI and portfolio capital inflow.<sup>1</sup>

Briefly, these dimensions can be explained as follows. *Static compara-*

1. A more detailed discussion of this framework is available in Chiranjib Sen, *Can India Look East? Assessing the Potential for India's Economic Relations with East Asia*, in S. Neelamegham, D. Midgley and C. Sen (editors) *Enterprise Management. New Horizons in Indo-Australian Collaboration*, Tata McGraw Hill, 1999.

Integration Strategy/Focus	Static Comparative Advantage	Technology & Productivity Improvement	Intra-Industry Trade	FDI & Portfolio Capital Flow
Mode 1	Strong	Weak	Weak	Moderate
Mode 2	Moderate	Strong	Strong	Moderate and Technology- focused
Mode 3	Strong	Weak	Weak (until per capita GDP rises to \$ 3000)	Strong, finance-driven and unfocused

*tive advantage* refers to international specialization based on current comparative cost advantages. For developing countries like India, this would typically mean specializing in the exports of primary commodities and labour intensive manufactures as well as tradable services like low-end software services. The pursuit of export competitiveness via long term technology and productivity enhancement is the approach of continuous industrial capacity upgradation in order to enter more profitable and technologically upscale markets. This has been the path followed by the East Asian 'miracle' economies, and it relies on strategic industrial policy.

Intra-industry trade is based on specialization in niche activities or product differentiation within sophisticated product and service markets. This is becoming the predominant mode of international trade between the industrialized countries. A typical example is automobiles which are shipped both ways between say the USA and Europe. Finally, the FDI and portfolio flow dimension is self-evident. The only point worth noting here is the dramatic rise in such flows in recent years, which has led many to view this as the defining characteristic of current globalization.

Since the patterns of potential competition and cooperation between India and these countries vary across these dimensions, the particular strategy choice has a powerful determin-

ing influence on the prospects of international economic ties. The accompanying Table provides the association between the three modes of globalization and dimensions of international integration.

India has been pursuing the Mode 1 globalization strategy since the economic reforms began under P.V. Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh in 1991. This strategy has more than a family resemblance to the policy package endorsed by the liberal Washington consensus and recommended by orthodox neoclassical economic thought. Despite several changes of government and difficulties in implementation, the essential aspects of this international economic strategy have been maintained.

The results of following this strategy are apparent from empirical analyses of the commodity composition of India's trade basket. Labour and resource intensive commodities dominate India's export basket while science-based products which are scale-intensive and differentiated are low. This pattern has been strengthened in the last decade. Moreover, there has been no improvement in the index of export diversification.<sup>2</sup> FDI and portfolio capital flows, though substantially higher than in the near

2 See A. Ganesh-Kumar, Kunal Sen and Rajendra R. Vaidya, *India's Export Competitiveness and Finance*, in Kirit S. Parikh (ed.), *India Development Report 1999-2000*, Oxford University Press, 1999.

autarky conditions of the pre-reform era, are quite modest by international standards. All this confirms our classification of Indian strategy as Mode 1 globalization.

**M**eanwhile, before the Asian crisis, most of the East Asian NICs (newly industrializing countries) pursued Mode 2 globalization. There had also been, during this phase beginning in the 1980s, a remarkable intensification of intra-Asian trade, which reflected a new regional division of labour under the auspices of regional economic groupings such as the APEC and ASEAN. This phenomenon can be broadly described as a process by which the entire region *as a whole* exports the full spectrum of products (from primary to high-tech) mainly to advanced country markets. This specialization among the countries of the region has often been described as the 'flying geese' pattern.<sup>3</sup>

It implies that there is a technology leader Japan, followed by S. Korea and Taiwan in the next rung of technological sophistication, with countries such as Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand making up the rear of the flock. There are interlinkages between these countries, both of trade and investment, through which the dynamic pattern of competitive specialization is sustained. As wages rise, for example, the labour intensive export industries migrate from the 'senior' to 'junior' members of the flock. China and the United States have significantly challenged this Japan-led vision of regional specialization. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this paper, the long term dynamics of the region is well captured by the metaphor.

3. This is an old metaphor going back several decades. Not surprisingly it originated in Japan (in the work of Akamatsu).

What has this implied for India's economic relations with the region? Essentially, for the pre-crisis phase until 1997, by juxtaposing the two globalization modes, we can explain the rather low level of international linkage between India and the region.<sup>4</sup> As far as exports are concerned, India had to compete with the technology followers in the Asian grouping for advanced country markets in primary and labour-intensive industries. Lacking the relational foundations based on regional business networks, India was at a disadvantage in penetrating the markets of the more economically advanced regional economies such as Japan, S. Korea and Taiwan, and to a lesser extent Hong Kong and Singapore.<sup>5</sup> These business ties are more important in the Asian business milieu than elsewhere, as even the US and the EU have found to their chagrin. In this context, India's inability to enter any of the major East Asian regional trade groupings as a full member, cannot but have a significant dampening impact on trade.

**N**ow for the pre-crisis scenario with respect to investment. Several of the capital-surplus Asian countries have remained interested in exploring possibilities in India, including Japan, S. Korea and Singapore. However, here too the progress has been modest given India's halting, unfocused, and case by case approach to FDI. Thus, with India pursuing Mode 1 globalization, and East Asia following

4. Our argument may seem to contradict past issues of the *Economic Survey* (GOI) which have observed the rise in India's trade with Asia in the pre-crisis phase. No doubt, compared to the past, trade and investment links have grown. However, they remain low relative to the potential.

5. It is not coincidental that the Asian economies with which India's trade volumes have been relatively high are also those countries in which there is an Indian ethnic presence.

Mode 2 (with its own particular regional emphasis) the possibility of closer, strategically significant integration between the Indian and East Asian economies remained bleak in the 1991-97 period.

**T**o the above analysis, we should add another important influence on the choice of the mode of globalization. Throughout this period, starting in the 1980s, there was pressure on both India and the entire Asian region to accept, or at least shift towards globalization Mode 3. These pressures emanated from US and Europe based global corporations, and were expressed through a multiplicity of forums. These included bilateral demands (as in the US-Japan case), initiatives such as the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), the bargaining postures of these countries in the WTO negotiations, as also the actions of private business forums as in the Davos based World Economic Forum.

The agenda of 'deep integration' is to move beyond crossborder liberalization of goods and services to include two further dimensions: (a) free crossborder movement of assets of all kinds, and (b) harmonization of economic laws and regulatory frameworks across countries. These demands reflect the interests of powerful transnational interests in both finance and material production. Politically leveraging on the fiscal and balance of payments woes of developing countries, this approach is essentially one of dangling the carrots of markets and capital to induce these countries to accept the unfettered movement of capital.

Similarly, the persistent current account surpluses of the East Asian economies with North America and Europe serve as a ploy to achieve a similar objective of market access.

The economic rationale for Mode 3 is far from clear;<sup>6</sup> there is also substantial political opposition from organized labour in the rich countries. Nonetheless, these pressures have been significant, and investment regimes have been liberalized throughout Asia. Were Mode 3 to be adopted by the East Asian countries and/or by India, the prospects of closer integration between them would recede even further than has been the case. Such a globalization mode would tend to induce an intense phase of corporate restructuring driven by mergers and acquisitions, with US and European MNEs acquiring controlling interests in the region. The process would be accompanied by a greater role of foreign institutional investors, serving mainly as a conduit for western financial funds. Western countries, by and large, enjoy competitive advantage in the financial sector, and this would be reflected in this finance-driven type of international integration.

It is therefore important to assess the likelihood of the adoption of Mode 3 by India and countries in the East Asian region. Take the East Asian region first. The choice of Mode 3 does not appear to be one about which any of the governments are particularly enthusiastic, because it would severely delimit the scope of national economic policy making in a region in which public policy and discretionary intervention have been at the core of the so-called East Asian miracle. There is also very little evidence that home-grown liberal opposition to suffocating governmental intervention has led to demands for dismantling the

intervention systems. Indeed, it is only in the throes of economic crisis that most East Asian countries were dragged towards the type of deep harmonization that some western countries and the IMF have encouraged. One can therefore predict, with some assurance, that as the crisis recedes and the recovery takes hold, East Asian countries will attempt to retain as much of their Mode 2 strategy flexibility as possible. This trend is already visible in S. Korea, where the recovery has been marked.

We shall now take a closer look at South Korea. After the financial crisis, the IMF imposed stringent conditionalities on South Korea in return for its bailout package. These recommendations, if followed through, would 'completely overhaul the structure of governance of the Korean economy.'<sup>7</sup> The thrust of these conditionalities was to bring about a comprehensive restructuring of the financial sector, the dismantling of existing ties between the government, banks and businesses, the undertaking of substantial trade liberalization, full-fledged capital account liberalization aimed at entry of foreign investors, and labour market reforms to ease layoffs. As Rodrik aptly sums up, 'In effect, the reforms in labour market institutions, trade and capital accounts, and government-business relations entail a remoulding of the Korean economy in the image of a Washington economist's idea of a free market economy.' In short, this would mean Mode 3 globalization.

It turns out, however, that the Koreans have resisted following this blueprint. From Bagchi's account of the Korean recovery,<sup>8</sup> one may con-

clude the following: (i) The initial phase of Korean restructuring following the crisis led to numerous bankruptcies, but this process peaked in 1998. Most of the insolvent firms were small and medium enterprises. (ii) There was a phase immediately following the crisis during which the Korean government liberalized the FDI regime, and foreign firms used the opportunity to acquire Korean firms leading to a spate of takeovers. (iii) However, these trends have been countered by a recovery engineered by the *chaebols* (conglomerates) which are the mainstay of the Korean economy. Some of them had been instrumental in the borrowing spree that spawned the crisis.

What needs to be noted is that most of these companies were able to withstand the crisis and avoid foreign takeovers. Urged by the government, these chaebols engaged in the so-called 'Big Deal', a process of corporate restructuring whereby these conglomerates swapped assets between themselves in order to streamline their portfolio of companies and focus on 'core competence'. Through a relational process outside the stock market framework, corporate restructuring has occurred, leading to a group of formidable national firms with enhanced competitive strength.

Thus we see a non Schumpeterian process of reorganization at work in Korea, which pre-empts the market mediated alternative, yet another demonstration of the enormous organizational flexibility of East Asia. As a result, foreign takeovers have been stalled in the chaebol sector.<sup>9</sup> (iv) The result of this process is that Korean firms have again

6. See for example, Dani Rodrik, *Governing the Global Economy: Does One Architectural Style Fit All*. Paper prepared for the Brookings Institution Trade Policy Forum conference on *Governing in a Global Economy*, 15-16 April 1999. See also J. Bhagwati, 'The Capital Myth', *Foreign Affairs*, May-June 1998.

7. Rodrik, *op cit.*, p. 5.

8. See Amiya Kumar Bagchi, 'A Turnaround in South Korea', *Frontline*, 30 July 1999.

9. There are of course some exceptions. Daewoo Motors might turn out to be a major exception. Between September 1997 and June 1998, foreign firms (mainly from the US

achieved dramatic export growth since 1998. And as the recovery gains ground the Koreans have become less willing to shift to Mode 3 and are showing signs of reverting to Mode 2. This confirms our argument above that the switch to Mode 3 in this region is more a sign of distress and response to coercion than an integration strategy that government *and* business would voluntarily embrace.

**T**urning now to India, what are the prospects of a switch in the mode of globalization? India's ability to succeed with a Mode 1 strategy has, in the last few years, suffered a setback with the slump in export growth. Though a turnaround is likely, the long term prospects with Mode 1 are not bright. The reason is that with the new global tendency for trade liberalization and export orientation, competition will be increasingly severe. There are many developing countries now scrambling for export markets in labour intensive products, and which are targeting the same advanced country markets.

While labour intensive exports can and should provide the initial platform, India must evolve a framework for diversification and quality improvement of her export basket. With the end of the MFA, even in traditional exports like textiles and apparel, quality based competition will become essential. India's export performance has been boosted in recent years by success in a non-conventional labour-intensive product – software services. But here too, rising wages of software professionals imply that long term competitiveness can only be sustained through productivity increases and entry into the more lucrative but technologically and organizationally

and Germany) acquired 11 large Korean enterprises. See *World Investment Report 1998* (UNCTAD), p. 336, for details.

challenging segments of the software industry.

Finally, what has been the effect of Mode 1 globalization on the core manufacturing industries? External sector liberalization has been justified on the grounds that it would lead to increased efficiency and productivity in Indian industry. While competition has certainly increased, there is no firm indication yet of Indian industry graduating to globally competitive positions, excluding a small number of information technology and pharmaceutical firms. The export participation of organized industry as a whole remains low. Since India is likely to remain committed to maintaining its momentum of international economic integration, the foregoing observations suggest that a market pressure driven policy shift will emerge in the near future.

**W**hich way will India shift – Mode 3 or Mode 2? It would seem that the gradualism and caution which have characterized India's external sector policies are likely to continue. More than ideology, they reflect the pragmatic requirements of political survival of coalition governments. The only circumstance in which this might change is if India sinks into a deep economic crisis through misfortune or financial mismanagement. In that case, we would have to face the types of conditionalities from our financial 'rescuers' similar to those faced by the devastated Asian countries. Mode 3 is therefore not likely, even though pressures from a number of international platforms would continue. Since Mode 1 is likely to encounter difficulties in the future, beleaguered governments lacking an alternative vision may be compelled to edge towards Mode 3 in small steps. It would, in my view, be wiser to shift towards Mode 2. This would, how-

ever, require a change in our style of economic governance.

**T**he major change entailed in the shift from Mode 1 to Mode 2 would be to accord more attention to the *micro dimensions* of economic policy. Hitherto, the reforms have been *macro driven*, i.e., the central concern has been to manage the macro economy properly. An example of such a focus is to view FDI primarily as a conduit for foreign savings, and its management mainly in terms of the balance of payments. Mode 2 is more concerned with *competitiveness*, and thus issues of industrial capability, technology transfer, operational efficiency of firms become the key foci of policy. On the road to globalization, the shift from Mode 1 to Mode 2 is necessary, particularly in relation to the large, organized industrial sector.

Policies must deal not merely with conventional macro economic objectives (level of output, price level, exchange rate and stability of output), but with others (international competitiveness, structure of output, productivity, and patterns of innovation).<sup>10</sup> The content of micro policy would need to vary between sectors of the economy, and this would mean closer cooperation between government, business and civil society actors. Policy making capacity and appropriate processes would, however, have to be built. Improbable as this might seem, there is already some evidence in India of efforts to evolve sector specific approaches for attaining/maintaining competitiveness as exemplified by the National Task Force for Information Technology. It is therefore possible to imagine the adoption of Mode 2.

Let us then consider a scenario in which both India and South Korea

<sup>10</sup> See J.H. Dunning, *The Global Economy, National Governments and Supranational*

adopt Mode 2. What would be the prospects for trade and investment ties? This situation would be the most propitious for mutually beneficial relations. The following factors need to be borne in mind in assessing the potential of such linkage.<sup>11</sup>

\* Even though the strategy pursued is Mode 2, it is to be implemented in a changed global environment. There have been substantial internal reforms in both countries, and these will continue. The net effect would be to considerably facilitate cross-flows of international trade and investment.

\* From the Korean standpoint, India is attractive on a number of counts. It remains a long term attraction as a large market. Also, India can play a role in the global cost reduction plans of large Korean enterprises. For historical reasons, South Korea may not be able to access the Chinese economy and its labour force as much as some other countries in the region. India is therefore an attractive alternative. India's educated and technologically skilled workforce is a strong asset, and its quality is being increasingly recognized abroad. The possibility of India being an export production base is quite strong.

This trend is already evident in the case of automobiles, and is likely to accelerate. The Koreans have an effective industrial R&D system which is particularly strong in its adaptive capabilities, but not as strong in the basic sciences. India may be able to provide a complementary basic science capability in certain niche areas, given its network of science and technology institutions. For all these rea-

sons, Korean FDI would be attracted to India and provide a basis for these linkages to take hold. Indeed, the trend in Korean FDI is sharply upwards, and it would only increase if the Indian growth rate were to rise.

\* From the Indian perspective, the main attractions of deepening economic relations with South Korea would lie in the following opportunities. India's strength in the IT sector means that East Asia is an attractive market, and the penetration of the Korean market is low at present. There has been a change in the attitude of young Koreans who seem keen on entrepreneurial activities, and there is a growing interest in IT as well. This would make Korea an attractive base for Indian IT firms, perhaps for forging alliances.

In the core manufacturing sectors, strategic alliances might make it feasible for India to learn from the strong manufacturing efficiency of Korean enterprises. Opportunities for cooperation abound in electronics, textiles and auto components industries. Indian industry associations, such as FICCI and CII, have noted the strong technological capabilities of Korean small and medium enterprises (SMEs). India might gain from international strategic tie-ups between Indian and Korean firms in this category. If successful, this could have a substantial impact on Indian technology capacity in the SME sector in which we lag behind. Technology and organization upgradation here could make possible a far greater degree of local value addition and make international ancillary ties more feasible. India could also benefit from Korean expertise in infrastructure projects – in ports, roads and so on. Last but not least, Korea could pro-

vide a substantial market for Indian primary products, such as agricultural exports.

\* A final consideration is the potential role of an Indo-Korean economic relationship in providing the foundation for a stronger Indian presence and participation in the East Asian economic zone. A strategic and multipronged, two-way relationship with Korea would provide a presence and positive image for India and Indian products in the entire region. It would provide an economic window to the region, which is difficult to traverse without first establishing relational networks. India needs one or two countries with which it could establish substantive ties. South Korea and perhaps Singapore would be the two most suitable. This could in time lead to strengthened ties with Taiwan, the People's Republic of China and others. One can also predict with some confidence that, should this occur, India would be inducted into the Asia-Pacific economic grouping and derive such benefits as are now available only to the members of this club.

As it happens, the political basis for developing a deeper relationship with South Korea already exists. India's relationship with that country has always been friendly and without friction. Cultural ties go back a long way. Diplomatic and business to business contacts have been strengthening in recent years. Bilateral economic flows have increased substantially, making South Korea the single largest source of FDI (\$ 714 million) in the first 10 months of calendar year 1999. All of these are indicators of the underlying soundness of a closer strategic economic relationship being suggested in this paper. Needless to say, our argument does not imply that such relations should be exclusive. Under Mode 2, both countries would apply their specific strategic criteria in

Economic Regimes. Discussion Paper 1997/E/30, Centre for International Management and Development, University of Antwerp.

11. This section of the paper has benefited from the contributions of fellow participants at The Third India-Korea Dialogue, organised by the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations and the Seoul

Forum for International Affairs, New Delhi, 17-18 December 1999. Without implicating any individual in the views expressed here, I would like to acknowledge this debt.



assessing economic relations with all other countries. In particular, SAARC would benefit and get revitalized, rather than being weakened. An economically resurgent India is the surest catalyst to put the SAARC process on an economic cooperation track, for then we would be in a position to offer some meaningful economic benefits to other member nations.

**T**o conclude, let us sum up the main argument of this paper. I have argued that prospects for a more robust economic relationship with the East Asian countries are good. But the extent to which this potential can be translated into reality is conditional on the general approach to globalization that India and the countries in the region choose to adopt. This is an era of intense change in policy frameworks, and India is certainly not the only country undergoing economic reform. It is in fact hard to think of a country where economic models are not being revised. East Asia, after the financial crisis, is in the throes of major structural readjustment. The entire process is closely related to the rapid integration of the world economy.

For this reason, the paper has delineated three plausible alternative modes of globalization. I have tried to explain the relatively low level of integration with East Asia by showing the limitations imposed by our current mode of globalization (Mode 1). Under Mode 3, it has been argued, the prospects of special and significant ties with East Asia would be the lowest. Though there are strong external pressures on India and the East Asian countries to adopt Mode 3, this is not likely to occur except under conditions of economic distress. Countries in the region are likely to resist the imposition by the western advanced nations of 'imperial harmonization'

of standards and regulatory frameworks, and total capital mobility. South Korea for example is moving back towards Mode 2, as its recovery gains ground.

The paper suggests that Mode 2 would be the most advantageous for India, as the long term sustainability of Mode 1 is doubtful. Mode 2 globalization would offer the best possibility for strategic linkage with the region. Since by definition, strategic integration involves prioritization and assessment of options, we have confined the discussion here to a consideration of Mode 2 linkage with only one country, South Korea. This country, in our view, should receive closer attention in our international economic strategy in the Asian region. The avenues of gainful interchange with South Korea under Mode 2 have been delineated. A more complete analysis would require detailed analysis for each East Asian country.

**T**he shift to Mode 2 in India, though desirable, requires some preconditions to be fulfilled. Essentially, it would require a revamp of our economic policy apparatus to improve the quality of economic governance. Greater coordination within government between diplomatic and international economic positions, and between macro economic and sectoral policies are obvious requirements. Because Mode 2 entails greater use of sector-specific microeconomic policy intervention, the information demands of such policies are high. Hence, what is also needed are the institutional means to foster closer interaction between policy makers and implementers, and business, academia and civil society. If such institutional capacity building can be achieved, Mode 2 globalization would be feasible, and India would be able to reap benefits through greater cooperation with Asia.

# Prospects for a Bay of Bengal community

V SURYANARAYAN

AT the beginning of the 21st century, two contradictory tendencies can be seen in the international system. At one end is the reassertion of national identities. The Soviet Union, which was bound together by a single ideology and centralised party dictatorship, has disintegrated paving the way for new state formations. At the other end, free and independent states are voluntarily coming together to form larger associations, in the process ceding some of their sovereign rights. One classic example is the European Union. These two contradictory tendencies of disintegration and unification have to be kept in mind in any analysis of success or failure of regional cooperation in different parts of the world.

Equally relevant are the legacies of the colonial era. The inter state boundaries in the developing world are a consequence of colonial domination. Instead of uniting people who belong to the same ethnic group, speak the same language and follow the same religion, these states have tended

to divide them. Thus there are Nagas and Mizos in India and Myanmar, both communities sharing a feeling of alienation; Malays in Malaysia and Southern Thailand. One part of Timor came under the control of Portugal and the other under Holland. One part of Kalimantan was under British rule and, therefore, became part of Malaysia; the other was under Dutch rule and, therefore, became a province of Indonesia.

What is more, the concept of 'area' – South Asia, Southeast Asia, and West Asia – which gained currency after the Second World War, was an offshoot of our intellectual dependence on western scholarship. In fact, the Cold War and colonial legacies in the university system have done incalculable harm to Indian scholarship and thought processes. More than four decades ago, as a postgraduate student in the Department of History in Bombay University, I had to study a paper on the history of the Far East, covering China and Japan. How China, our northern neighbour

became Far East was a riddle I was unable to solve at that time.

The last four decades have not seen much improvement in the Indian academic scene. The University of Madras offers a course on India and its neighbours to the postgraduate students of history. The countries covered in that course include Pakistan, China, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Maldives. My repeated attempts to include Thailand and Indonesia, our maritime neighbours, in the course have so far not succeeded. Despite our maritime heritage, few people in India are conscious of the fact that the island of Pu Breush, located in the North West of Sumatra, is only 92 nautical miles away from Indira Point, which is less than the distance between Chennai and Tirupati. Similarly, Phuket in Thailand is only 273 nautical miles away from Indira Point, which is less than the distance between Chennai and Madurai.

**T**he United States was the first to realize that knowledge is power. American universities recognised the salience between scholarship and foreign policy. Bruce Cumings of the Northwestern University has rightly pointed out that the Area Studies Programmes, initiated during the height of the Cold War, were the 'creation of the national security state.' These programmes were structured and financed, and their research agendas and methodologies set, by the 'state/intelligence/foundation nexus.' Those who held dissenting views had to face difficult times. 'Henry Kissinger at Harvard, William Buckley at Yale or President Raymond Allen at the University of Washington, regularly spied for the Federal Bureau of Investigation, providing information concerning "subversive activities" at these institutions.'

The research agenda set by U.S. academicians was aped by many universities in the developing countries. As Cumings vividly illustrates, the position of the U.S. in the global scene, and rivalry with communist countries determined what should be studied and researched. For example, missing from the literature extolling the South Korean miracle 'was the fact that thousands of its workers and students were being beaten and professors tortured and jailed by their governments.' Equally important, 'Japan got favoured treatment as a success story of development, and China got obsessive attention as a pathological example of abortive development.'

**T**he Indian universities blindly accepted the American terms of reference, especially those relating to division of the world into different areas. The artificial division between South and Southeast Asia is a clear illustration of our intellectual dependence.

India has land and maritime boundaries with Myanmar and maritime boundaries with Thailand and Indonesia. These countries are not only our next door neighbours, Indian political ideas, institutions, religion, art and language have in the past profoundly influenced them. In his book, *The Discovery of India*, Jawaharlal Nehru quotes from a letter that he received from a Thai student who studied at Shantiniketan: 'I always consider myself exceptionally fortunate in being able to come to this great and ancient land of *Aryavarta* and pay my humble homage at the feet of grandmother India in whose affectionate arms my mother country was so lovingly brought up and taught to appreciate and love what was sublime and beautiful in culture and religion.'

Nehru further added: 'There was a time when India was a mother

country to them and nourished them with rich fare from her own treasure house. Just as Hellenism spread from Greece to the countries of the Mediterranean and in Western Asia, India's cultural influences spread to many countries and left its powerful impress upon them.'

**T**he Indonesian nationalist leader Sukarno echoed the same sentiments. In a special article in *The Hindu* on 4 January 1946, Sukarno wrote: 'In the veins of every one of my people flows the blood of Indian ancestors and the culture that we possess is steeped through and through with Indian influences. Two thousand years ago people from your country came to Jawadvipa and Suvarnavdipa in the spirit of brotherly love. They gave the initiative to found powerful kingdoms such as those of Sri Vijaya, Mataram and Majapahit. We then learnt to worship the very Gods that you now worship still and we fashioned a culture that even today is largely identical with your own. Later, we turned to Islam: but that religion too was brought by people coming from both sides of India.'

Indian contacts with Southeast Asia did not snap in the 13th century. Recent research in maritime history clearly proves that Keralites, Tamils and Gujaratis had extensive contacts with Southeast Asia in the medieval period. In fact, in the Islamisation of Indonesia, the Muslims from Gujarat and Malabar, Tamil Nadu and Bengal played a decisive role.

It is necessary to highlight the fact that historians like K.M. Panikkar, Nilakanta Shastri and R.C. Majumdar used the term Southeast Asia to cover both present day South Asia and Southeast Asia. By accepting the American concept that Southeast Asia – countries stretching from Myanmar to the Philippines – is a different entity, we

intellectually distanced ourselves from our immediate neighbours. Another fallout was that Southeast Asian Studies never received adequate encouragement from the University Grants Commission and other funding agencies.

**T**he concept of the ocean as a unifying force and focus of regional cooperation has not yet been fully grasped. Take Southeast Asia as an example. Except Laos, which is landlocked, all others are maritime countries. Singapore is an island state and Indonesia and the Philippines are archipelagic states. Even within ASEAN, issues relating to maritime cooperation have not received adequate attention.

Throughout history, sailing was an important means of communication between South India and distant lands. As Arasaratnam has pointed out, India acted as a bridge between the East and West. Hence the Arab name for the Southwestern coast of India – Ma'abar – is the Arabic word for 'bridge' or 'crossway'.

We in India should redefine the concept of 'area' taking into consideration both historical realities and geopolitical imperatives. In recent years, I have advocated the concept of a 'Bay of Bengal community'. In a wider sense, the Bay of Bengal community would also include the littoral states of the Andaman Sea and the Malacca Strait. The underlying idea is not to replace SAARC or ASEAN, but to have an additional organisation, which will bring together India and its southern and eastern neighbours.

The Bay of Bengal occupies an area of 2,172,000 sq kms. It is bordered by India and Sri Lanka to the West, Bangladesh to the North, and Myanmar and the southern part of Thailand to the East. Its southern boundary extends as an imaginary line from Dondra Head at the south-

ern end of Sri Lanka to the northern tip of Sumatra. A number of large rivers – Ganges, Brahmaputra, Irrawaddy, Godavari, Mahanadi, Krishna and Cauvery – flow into the Bay of Bengal. Among the important ports are Calcutta, Cuddalore, Kakinada, Machilipatnam, Madras, Paradip and Vishakapatnam.

The Andaman Sea is a part of the northeastern Indian Ocean and occupies an area of 798,000 sq kms. It is bounded to the North by the Irrawaddy delta of Myanmar; to the East by peninsular Myanmar, Thailand and Malaysia; to the West by the Andaman and Nicobar Islands; to the South by the island of Sumatra in Indonesia and the Malacca Strait. Its important ports are Bassein, Tavoy, Mergui and Rangoon. The Andaman Sea is Myanmar's major sea link with the outside world.

**T**he Strait of Malacca connects the Andaman Sea and the South China Sea. It has an area of 65,000 sq kms. It runs between the Indonesian island of Sumatra and West Malaysia. It derives its name from Malacca, the headquarters of an important maritime empire. The Strait of Malacca is one of the most important shipping channels in the world. The Indians, Chinese, Arabs, Portuguese, Dutch and the British successfully controlled the maritime trade in different periods and shaped the history of the region.

Historically, all members of the Bay of Bengal community – India, Bangladesh, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Sri Lanka have witnessed dynamic interaction between maritime trade and cultural evolution. What Kenneth McPherson wrote about the Indian Ocean in general applies with greater validity to the Bay of Bengal. 'The Indian Ocean region was the home of the world's first urban civilization, and the centre

of the first sophisticated commercial and maritime activities. The ocean – as a great highway and source of food and raw materials was a vital force moulding the many societies on its shores long before people maintained written records.'

**O**ne out of five people in the world is a part of the Bay of Bengal community. The region is rich in natural and mineral sources. A recent publication of the FAO financed Bay of Bengal Programme points out: 'It encompasses the continental shelf off the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Indonesia, where tuna are abundant, the nutrient rich upland riverine basins and the unique Sunderbans mangrove ecosystems of India and Bangladesh that support a host of fin and shell fish species of commercial significance; and the valuable coral reefs of Malaysia, Thailand and Myanmar.'

The Bay of Bengal is a gift of 'Mother Nature' and the littoral states can cooperate with one another for common wellbeing. Recently, cyclonic storms lashed Bangladesh and the Orissa coast. If the littoral states had agreed to cooperate in the crucial area of weather forecasting, preventive measures could have been adopted and the population evacuated from the coastal areas well in advance of nature's fury. Similarly, the Bay of Bengal is used by the insurgents in the North East and the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) in Sri Lanka to illegally smuggle weapons. This maritime terrorism could easily be contained were the littoral states to share intelligence and coordinate their anti-terrorist activities. The list could be multiplied.

In short, exploitation of living and non-living maritime resources; development of maritime communications; ship building and ship repair; weather forecasting; prevention of

pollution and combating maritime terrorism – these tasks, which are the exclusive responsibilities of individual countries at present, can best be accomplished through regional cooperation.

**U**nlike the South China Sea, where conflicting territorial claims threaten peace and stability, the Bay of Bengal region is an area of relative tranquility. India has settled its maritime boundaries with all its Southeast Asian neighbours. Agreements were signed with Indonesia in 1974 and 1977, with Thailand in 1978, with Myanmar in 1987, and the trijunction among India, Thailand and Indonesia in 1978. As far as South Asia is concerned, the maritime boundaries with Sri Lanka were demarcated by maritime agreements in 1974 and 1976. The agreements were based on the principle of equidistance, though in the case of Sri Lanka and Myanmar, New Delhi made some concessions in the interest of good neighbourly relations. Currently, the only unsettled maritime border is with Bangladesh. India's keenness to settle the border has not been reciprocated. What is more, the New Moore island is a subject matter of territorial dispute between the two countries.

Cooperation among the Bay of Bengal community would pave the way for confidence building in security related issues as well. It may be recalled that the modest expansion of the Indian Navy near the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the 1970s and 1980s, led to adverse reactions in Australia and some Southeast Asian capitals. However, welcome initiatives taken by India in the '80s and the '90s have gone a long way in removing apprehensions from Southeast Asian countries about the Indian Navy's intentions and capabilities. Prime Minister Goh Chok Thong of Singa-

pore expressed fears about the accelerated growth of the Indian Navy. It was only after the situation was explained that he was appeased. ASEAN concerns regarding naval expansion in the region have been allayed after visits by senior officials from these countries to the naval facilities in the Andaman archipelago. What is more, joint naval exercises with the United States, Australia, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia (and also with ASEAN collectively, appropriately called MILAN) have contributed to a better appreciation of India's security needs.

**T**he increased cooperation, however, suffered a temporary setback following Pokhran II in May 1998. I have used the term temporary because there is considerable sympathy and understanding of India's nuclear policy in the region. It is necessary to highlight the fact that at the Manila Summit, despite strong pressure from the United States, Japan and the European Community, ASEAN leaders sidestepped the issue of condemning India and Pakistan for their nuclear tests. The Chairman's statement only expressed 'grave concern and strongly deplored the recent nuclear tests in South Asia.' Naturally, India dissociated itself from the statement.

In this connection, New Delhi should seriously consider one policy option. Over the years, India has consistently opposed the concept of 'nuclear free zones' in different areas. In the context of the changed strategic environment in Southeast Asia and the imperatives of improving relations with countries in the region, India should seriously consider endorsing the Treaty of Southeast Asian Nuclear Free Zone (SEANWFZ). The five nuclear powers have taken an ambiguous stand on this proposal. Should India support the concept of

SEANWFZ, the gesture would be welcomed by all Southeast Asian countries.

The Bay of Bengal community as a specific area of regional cooperation, deserves greater attention from academicians and policy planners. The first step in this direction was the establishment of BIMSTEC (Bangladesh-India-Myanmar-Sri Lanka-Thailand Economic Cooperation) in June 1998. This is the first organisation of its kind in which two ASEAN members have come together with three countries in South Asia for economic cooperation. The areas identified for cooperation include communication, infrastructure, energy, trade, investment, tourism and fisheries. It is high time New Delhi took the initiative and opened a dialogue with Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore to form a wider Bay of Bengal community. By forming such an organization, the 'extended neighbourhood', as the Ministry of External Affairs refers to these countries, would rightly become a part of the 'immediate neighbourhood'. The concept of a Bay of a Bengal community would become the common agenda of all littoral states.

**T**he idea of a Bay of Bengal community deserves serious consideration for two additional reasons. First, it would enable India to come out of the India-Pakistan deadlock, which has been the curse of South Asian cooperation. Prime Minister Vajpayee's visit to Lahore and the inauguration of the Delhi-Lahore-Delhi bus service in February 1999 were illustrations of New Delhi's sincere desire to build bridges with Pakistan to pave the way for a secure and peaceful South Asia. However, the recent Kargil crisis and Pakistan's blatant involvement in the violation of the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir have set the

clock back as far as the peace process is concerned.

What is more, international response has been very favourable to India. Washington, in particular, and Beijing, to an extent, played a decisive role in persuading Pakistan to end its misadventure. The two countries are of the view that India-Pakistan differences should be resolved through mutual dialogue. The ASEAN also echoed similar sentiments. In a joint communiqué issued at the end of the meeting of foreign ministers in August 1999, ASEAN had urged India and Pakistan to adhere to the process of dialogue to resolve the 'dispute'.

Second, and equally important, is the China factor. Southeast Asian countries are today engaged in constructive interaction with China; at the same time they have, in varying degrees, apprehensions and misgivings about China's long term intentions and capabilities. The Sino-Vietnam conflict in March 1988 near the Spratlys is a grim reminder that China could take advantage of the vulnerability of its southern neighbours and even resort to force to buttress its territorial claims. Both Hanoi and Beijing have rendered the problem complex by granting oil exploration licenses in the same area.

In February 1995, China and the Philippines clashed over territorial claims in the Mischief Reef. In December 1998, the Filipino and the Chinese navies had another altercation in the same area; in July 1999, tensions again erupted following the sinking of a Chinese boat by the Filipino navy. Despite Beijing's attempts to shelve the territorial claims, discerning observers continue to look at the South China Sea as a likely flashpoint. The fact that China and Pakistan do not belong to the Bay of Bengal community are plus factors; it would definitely reduce strategic dissonance in the region.

## ASEAN after the crisis

V V BHANOJI RAO

THE collapse of the Thai baht on 2 July 1997 signaled the most serious crisis of confidence that the economies in the ASEAN<sup>1</sup> region (as well as the Northeast Asian economies<sup>2</sup>) have faced in recent years.<sup>3</sup> The impact of the confidence crisis within ASEAN differed across countries and was very much linked to the volume and volatility of capital inflow into them. Thus, the initial impact of the confidence crisis was most felt among those attracting sizeable amounts of international capital<sup>4</sup>: Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand.

As short term capital began to leave and the currencies came under severe pressure, the economic and

1 ASEAN stands for the Association of Southeast Asian nations comprising Brunei, Indonesia, Cambodia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam

2 Korea was especially affected, while Taiwan too was involved.

3. It is well known that the exemplary economic performance of the East Asian economies has been dubbed the East Asian miracle. An analysis of the growth performance and the identification of the miracle economies is available in V.V. Bhanoji Rao, 'East Asian Economies: Growth within a International Context', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 7 February 1998, pp. 291-296

4 When the East Asian economies removed capital controls during the 1990s, inflows of foreign capital amounting to 5-10% of GDP

social fundamentals, institutions and policy responses differed as did the consequences.<sup>5</sup> As Table 1 portrays, in terms of the impact and evolution of the confidence crisis, Indonesia suffered the maximum and Singapore the least.

**T**he region is now posting signs of recovery. The factors that have contributed to it are the relatively low international interest rates, Japanese reflation (US\$ 80 billion worth of permanent tax cuts for individuals and corporations), Japan's US\$30 billion aid package for East Asia, injection of new money from the IMF (US\$ 90 billion), the overall supportive stance of G7 countries and strong U.S. growth. Most commentators on the economic health of the region, however, caution that many problems still remain and the recovery is rather fragile. This is because there are, in fact, ranges of recovery within the region: robust recovery in Singapore, cautious optimism in Malaysia, fragile recovery in Thailand and continuing uncertainty in Indonesia.

The Singapore economy grew strongly in the second quarter of 1999, a sharp rebound from the preceding quarter (Table 2). The commerce and manufacturing sectors also expanded by over 20% on a seasonally adjusted quarter-on-quarter basis. The boost for the manufacturing sector came from the expansion of the electronics industry by 23% as output of telecommunication equipment surged with a strong demand for cellular phones. Growing global demand also boosted the manufacturing of semiconductors, while the regional recovery stimulated

assisted them in obtaining fast growth. But, there is now growing recognition that capital can come in as well as go out quickly and a concerted outflow could spell disaster.

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed discussion, see V.V. Bhanaji Rao, 'East Asian Economies: The Crisis of 1997-98', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 6 June 1998, pp.1397-1416.

a higher output of PCBAs. Chemicals and chemical products industry grew by 38%, led by the increase in production of pharmaceuticals for exports to the U.S. and Europe. The construction sector continued to be in a slump.

Singapore's total trade rose sharply by 8% in the second quarter of 1999, reversing the 9.4% contraction in the preceding quarter. The rebound reflected the growing strength of the recovery of global electronics demand and the bottoming out of the crisis hit Asian economies.

There was a strong rebound in the financial services sector. The main engine driving the robust growth was the stock market, which surged by 587% and 359% in volume and value terms compared to declines of 40% and 21% respectively in the first quarter.

In line with the pickup in economic activities, the labour market improved in the second quarter. Total employment rose by an estimated 15,400 in the second quarter, compared with a decline of 9,600 in the preceding quarter. This is the first quarterly increase after four consecutive quarters of declines. The season-

ally adjusted unemployment rate continued to trend downwards, easing to 3.3% in June 1999 from 3.9% in March 1999.

Reflecting the impact of the cost cutting package implemented from January and a strong improvement in productivity, the unit business cost (UBC) index of the manufacturing sector fell by 16% in the second quarter after a decline of 14% in the earlier quarter. The unit labour cost (ULC) index of the manufacturing sector showed a substantial decline of 24%, compared with the 19% fall in the first quarter. This was due to strong labour productivity growth.

Manufacturing investment commitments totalled \$2.1 billion in the second quarter of 1999, higher than the \$1.7 billion in the first quarter. Two-thirds of the commitments came from foreign investors, led by the U.S. (39% share) and Japan (15% share). The latest surveys of business expectations show that the outlook of most industries continues to improve. The Ministry of Trade and Industry is raising the 1999 GDP forecast from 0-2% to 4-5%.

TABLE 1

From Confidence Crisis to Other Crises, As of Mid-1998						
Country	Confidence Crisis	Currency Crisis	Financial Crisis	Economic Crisis	Social Crisis	Political Crisis
Indonesia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Malaysia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Averted	Averted	Averted
Thailand	Yes	Yes	Yes	Averted	Averted	Averted
Singapore	Yes	Yes	Averted	Averted	Averted	Averted

TABLE 2

Singapore: Economic Growth, 1998-99 percentage change over previous period (annualised)							
Growth (%) of	1998				1999		
	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual	Q1	Q2	
GDP	-3.1	-1.2	3.8	0.3	3.6	21.7	
Manufacturing	-6.8	-3.3	5.0	-0.5	36.5	22.3	
Construction	-2.9	-6.5	-12.5	3.9	-16.6	-22.7	
Commerce	-7.2	-4.7	-4.0	-4.0	8.3	25.1	
Transport & Communications	6.8	-1.0	8.4	5.5	9.1	10.0	
Financial & Business Services	-3.6	-4.2	11.5	-0.9	-18.8	41.7	

Source: Ministry of Trade and Industry, Singapore

The future of the economy in the medium term is closely linked to the efficiency and growth of the manufacturing and financial sectors.<sup>6</sup> In respect of the latter, in the middle of May 1999, the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) announced a five year programme of liberalization (to allow greater competition in the sector),<sup>7</sup> measures aimed at improving corporate governance practices and lifting the 40% foreign shareholding limit in local banks. The aim is to move towards a more open and competitive environment so as to spur the development and upgrading of local banks.<sup>8</sup>

**W**hether it is the pre 1970 growth process based on thriving rubber, tin

6. Singapore is an established financial centre. The city state is the fourth largest foreign exchange trading centre in the world. Singapore comes behind only London, New York and Tokyo in foreign exchange trading, with an average trading volume of US\$167 billion in 1997, for instance. It is the fifth largest trader in derivatives and the ninth largest offshore lending centre: the Asian Dollar Market is one of the premier offshore banking centres in Asia and the Singapore International Monetary Exchange (SIMEX) has grown into one of the world's leading derivatives exchanges. The country of just over 3 million people has more than 700 financial institutions, local and foreign. They provide a wide range of financial services, including trade financing, foreign exchange, derivatives products, capital markets activities, loan syndication, underwriting, mergers and acquisitions, asset management, securities trading, financial advisory services and specialized insurance services.

7. Since the early 1970s, local banks were protected, especially in retail banking. A three tier licensing system was in place for commercial banks, comprising full banks, restricted banks, and offshore banks. No new licences for full and restricted banks were granted since 1970 and 1983 respectively. Foreign full banks are not allowed to set up new branches or relocate existing branches; install off-premise ATMs or share ATMs with other banks; or offer Electronic Funds Transfer at Point-of-Sale (Eftpos) services. (In wholesale banking, and in treasury and capital market activities, foreign banks compete more freely with local banks, while offshore banking is open completely.)

8. While government protection and strict MAS supervision enabled local banks to grow

and other primary exports and modest industrialisation, or the post 1970 growth based on industrial widening and deepening and industrial exports, one of the key facilitating factors was the exchange rate mechanism – fixed exchange rates in the Bretton Woods system and the subsequent regime of flexible exchange rates.

In the wake of the currency and financial crises of the late 1997 and 1998, Malaysia decided not to seek IMF help. Instead, on 1 September 1998, the Malaysian Central Bank (Bank Negara) announced a series of measures to insulate and protect the economy to minimise the impact of the global financial turmoil on the country. These included the establishment of a fixed exchange rate for the Malaysian ringgit (pegged at RM3.80 to the US dollar on September 2) and making the ringgit tradeable only in the country.

The new measures<sup>9</sup> are aimed at limiting the contagion effects of external developments on the Malaysian economy; preserving the recent gains made in terms of the policy measures

into sound, well-capitalised institutions and withstood the recent crisis, they still lagged behind the best international banks in terms of technology, expertise, range and quality of service to customers, and shareholders' returns. They will also face increasing competition within a globalised and internet connected world.

9. The main changes in the exchange control rules are as follows: \*External accounts: approval is required for transfer of funds bet-

to stabilise the domestic economy; ensuring stability in domestic prices and the ringgit exchange rate and creating an environment that is conducive for a revival in investor and consumer confidence and facilitate economic recovery. Assured, however, are the general convertibility of currency for current account transactions; free flows of direct foreign investment and repatriation of interest, profits and dividends and capital; and minimal inconvenience to the general public.

The superior 8.7% GDP growth achieved during 1990-97 in contrast to the 5.2% of 1980-90 has been facilitated by phenomenal increases in exports and investment, respectively occupying 90 and 43% shares in GDP in 1997, compared to 30 and 58% in 1980. The key question thus is whether currency controls will stimulate domestic investment and exports.

There was a strong 4.1% economic growth for the April to June period (Table 3). The official explanation is that the recovery has been due

ween external accounts. Transfers to residents' accounts are permitted only until 30 September 1998; thereafter, approval is required. Withdrawal of ringgit from external accounts requires approval, except for the purchase of ringgit assets. \*Authorized depository institutions: all purchases and sales of ringgit financial assets can only be transacted through authorised depository institutions. \*Trade settlement: all settlement of exports and imports must be made in foreign currency. \*Currency for travellers: with effect from 1 October 1998 travellers are allowed to import or export

TABLE 3

Growth (%) of	Malaysian Economic Growth, 1998-99					
	1998				1999	
	Q2	Q3	Q4	Year	Q1	Q2
GDP	-5.2	-10.9	-10.3	-7.5	-1.3	4.1
Agriculture	-6.9	-4.0	-4.8	-4.5	-3.5	8.7
Mining	0.3	1.2	5.1	1.8	-2.3	-6.0
Manufacturing	-10.3	-18.9	-18.6	-13.7	-1.1	10.4
Construction	-19.8	-28.0	-29.0	-23.0	-16.6	-6.0
Services	1.9	-3.7	-3.4	-0.8	0.6	0.6

Source: Bank Negara Website



to strong export growth, government spending and the stability brought about by capital controls. Manufacturing led the way in the second quarter, growing by 10.4% after a 1.1% contraction in the first quarter. This was due to strong external demand for electronics, mainly from the United States.

**A**griculture was the next strongest performer, recovering from a 3.5% contraction in the first quarter to grow by 8.7%. Overall, Malaysia's economy has grown by 1.4% in the first half of the year, putting it on track for full year growth of more than 3%. Government spending ballooned to RM 5.5 billion (\$2.4 billion), compared to RM 933 million in the first quarter, as Malaysia revived infrastructure projects stalled due to previous year's recession. Despite this, inflation slowed to 2.7% compared to 4% in the first quarter.

Trade surplus remained high at RM18.1 billion. The external debt position improved as Malaysia used its global bond issue to pay off short term debts; and the ratio of short term debt to external reserves fell to 24.5% from 28.9% at the end of March. The

ringgit currency of not more than RM 1,000 per person. The export of foreign currencies by resident travellers is permitted, up to a maximum of RM 10,000 equivalent. \*There are no limits on the import of foreign currencies by resident and non-resident travellers. The export of foreign currencies by non-resident travellers is permitted, up to the amount of foreign exchange brought into Malaysia. Subsequent to the announcements of early September, a number of clarifications were issued. Notable among them was that ringgit proceeds from the sale of shares listed on the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange could be taken out of the country only one year from the date of the sale, irrespective of the period for which the stocks had been owned. For more discussion on the capital controls, see V.V. Bhanoji Rao, 'Malaysia's Currency Controls: What they Mean and Whether they will Work', *Economic and Political Weekly* 33(41), 10-16 October 1998, pp. 2637-39.

TABLE 4

Thailand: GDP Growth Rates (over previous year)			
	1997	1998	1999-Q1
Total GDP	-1.3	-9.4	0.9
Agriculture	0	-0.7	0.8
Non-Agriculture	-1.4	-10.3	1.2

Source: BOT Web and Links.

interest rate was kept low at 5.5%. Bank Negara's Corporate Debt Restructuring Committee was working on restructuring the steel, transport and telecommunications industries.

The optimism about the near term has to be tempered with caution for a number of reasons. It is likely that some of the US \$7 billion in foreign portfolio capital will be pulled out once restrictions are eased. Foreign investment applications for manufacturing projects in Malaysia fell by 12% last year and another 21% in the first half of 1999. Export oriented electronics manufacturing has been the engine of Malaysia's economic rebound and this lack of fresh investments despite high capacity utilization of over 90%. This could mean that the electronics companies are uncertain about future demand in the event they want to commit fresh investments to Malaysia. There is also continued weakness in imports of capital goods, which have fallen 11.3% in the second quarter after falling 36% in the first.

By the end of August 1997 (that is just about a month after the nose diving of the baht), Thailand approached the IMF, which agreed to provide a \$17.2 billion standby assistance spread over 34 months. Government implementation of the conditions started soon after the conclusion of the agreement with IMF.<sup>10</sup>

10. The authorities suspended 58 finance firms. In December 1997, it was announced that 56 of the suspended firms would be closed. In addition, financial sector legislation was revised and various other steps were taken. To meet the IMF's target of a 1% fiscal surplus, the government increased its duties on import

The IMF bailout had begun to work by late 1998 and early 1999. The baht has strengthened and stabilised. From early 1999, when it was trading at 36 to the US dollar, the baht by late August 1999, strengthened to 38. The country's foreign reserves, nearly depleted by the flawed policy of the previous government, which took out US \$23 billion in forward contracts to defend the baht from speculators, have been replenished. They stood at \$31 billion in the middle of August. Interest rates fell from double digit figures to 7% in early 1999 and 4% in August. Inflation for 1998 stood at 8%. It was expected to be halved in 1999.

Buoyed by the return of foreign investors, the Thai bourse recovered, with the benchmark Stock Exchange of Thailand (SET) index staying above 300 points in early 1999, and reaching 469 on August 25.

**G**rowth of the economy has resumed since the first quarter of 1999 (Table 4), though the growth rate in the first quarter over the same period 12 months ago was only 0.9%. If the recovery is not short lived and is carried into the rest of 1999, Thailand could become the classic case of an IMF success story in a rather short period of time.

The fragile nature of recovery is due to continuing weaknesses in a number of areas. First, the non performing loans (NPL) of Thai banks, estimated at 45% of total loans in the financial system, or a staggering two trillion baht. Second, some 80% of small and medium sized companies are nearly bankrupt. It is not yet clear that bank and corporate restructuring are proceeding smoothly. For ins-

and luxury items and adjusted certain utility and state enterprise charges to reflect the larger baht depreciation. On the expenditure side, investments in utility programmes were reduced. Privatisation efforts were stepped up.

tance, in the middle of August 1999, the Thai central bank, after providing 185 billion baht (\$8.3 billion) to the country's second largest financial institution, Krung Thai Bank, dismissed all but one of Krung Thai's board members amid disagreement over how to proceed with its rescue.

Unlike Thailand, Indonesia's IMF bailout programme followed on a roller coaster track. The Indonesian exchange rate was close to 3600 Rupiah per dollar by late October 1997 compared to 2400 prior to July 1997. Indonesia signed the IMF standby agreement on October 31st for a 36-month programme involving assistance of \$43 billion. The sailing for the programme was not smooth, however. With the then Indonesian president declaring in early 1998 that the country might consider going the Currency Board way to stabilise the currency and IMF managing director disagreeing,<sup>11</sup> the currency nosedived to Rp 10,000 in mid February 1998.

There were widespread protests by students and civilian groups in Indonesia, initially protesting the price rises, and thereafter demanding the resignation of President Suharto. He resisted and stood firm. The political crisis became serious and most foreigners and some Indonesians began leaving the country. Some of Indonesia's friends such as the U.S. openly advised the president to resign while others (those notably within ASEAN) continued to respect the elder statesman while privately hoping that the Indonesian political crisis would be resolved soon. He resigned and in mid 1999, Indonesia had its first general

11. On 16 February 1998, Michel Camdessus said that the Indonesian plan to create a currency board could lead to 'skyrocketing interest rates' and heavy pressure on reserves. He also said that a currency board would 'violate' the terms of its \$43 billion rescue deal for Indonesia.

	1997	1998-Q1	1998-Q2	1998-Q3	1998-Q4	1998	1999-Q1
Agriculture	0.7	2.3	-2.4	-3.0	5.0	0.2	2.6
Mining and Quarrying	1.7	-2.5	-5.4	-6.7	-2.1	-4.2	-0.7
Manufacturing	6.4	1.7	-13.1	-18.8	-19.4	-12.9	-9.6
Utilities	12.8	6.8	1.3	0	6.9	3.7	7.7
Construction	6.4	-35.4	-43.0	-43.0	-37.5	-39.7	-5.0
Commerce	5.8	-10.4	-19.7	-22.8	-22.9	-19.0	-14.1
Transport and Comm.	8.3	3.0	-11.4	-19.7	-22.4	-12.8	-18.3
Fin. and Bus. Services	6.6	4.9	-4.7	-39.6	-57.9	-26.7	-47.6
Other Services	2.8	-5.2	-3.3	-5.2	-5.2	-4.7	-0.2
Total GDP	4.9	-4.0	-12.3	-18.4	-19.5	-13.7	-10.3

Source: Bank Indonesia Web Pages.

election, resulting in President Wahid taking over.

The latest economic report by the World Bank on Indonesia<sup>12</sup> notes the gradual stabilization of the economy. The following are indicators of stability. First, the exchange rate, which has moved down from Rp 2000 up until July 1997 to the lowest ever recorded levels of Rp 17000 prior to October 1998, began to recover. Since then, however, the rate has remained at around Rp 7000-8000. Second, the growth of the consumer price index, which was running at a high 82% in September 1998 declined to 24.5% by the end of June 1999. Moderation in the inflation rate has helped bring about a decline in the interest rate. A key central bank interest rate declined from a peak of 70% in August 1998 to 16% by the end of June 1999.

In 1998, GDP declined by a massive 14% (Table 5). Recent (Q1-1999) trends indicated a modest recovery though the growth rate continued to be negative.<sup>13</sup> The investment slump continues, however, and the so-called reduction in the negative growth in GDP in early 1999 was mainly due to

12. *Indonesia: From Crisis to Opportunity*, Jakarta: World Bank Resident Staff in Indonesia, July 1999.

13. Positive growth is targeted for the year 1999-2000 at 1.5 to 2.5% as indicated in the letter of intent sent to IMF by the Government of Indonesia on 22 July 1999.

consumption growth and a turnaround in exports.

Amidst some encouraging signs that have been seen over the first and the second quarters of the year, problems continue. Negative growth (though indicative of some recovery) will not have a favourable impact on the poor. The problem of poverty is serious. Percentage in absolute poverty climbed up from 11% in 1996 to some 18 to 20% – some 40 million people – by the end of 1998.

The Bank report cited earlier recommends immediate action on three fronts: bank and corporate restructuring, protection of the poor and fiscal sustainability. On the first, the report says: 'For banks, this means focusing on restructuring state banks, strengthening bank supervision, and accelerating asset recovery.' Recent events, however, are not in that direction. New scandals had broken in

	FDI Confidence Ranking, 1999 June	WEF Market Growth Rank
USA	1	1
China	2	6
India	6	12
Indonesia	>25	30
Malaysia	22	33
Singapore	20	27
Thailand	15	28

Source: WEF and AT Kearney Web Pages.

TABLE 7

Economy	Growth Rates, 1996-2000				
	1996	1997	1998	Estimate 1999	Forecast 2000
Indonesia	8.0	4.6	-13.7	-0.1	3.8
Malaysia	8.6	7.7	-6.8	4.9	5.2
Singapore	7.5	8.0	1.5	5.5	6.0
Thailand	5.5	-0.4	-8.0	4.2	5.0

Source: IMF, World Economic Outlook, May 1999 and *The Economist* poll of forecasters as of January 2000.

August 1999 and these seem to threaten the fragile economic stabilization that has been achieved so far.

The newest scandal – Bank Bali scandal – came into public view in August. The story pieced together from various sources is as follows. A company (PT Era Giat Prima) owned by the deputy treasurer of the ruling Golkar party (Setya Novanto) received a whopping 546 billion Rupiah (US\$80 million) fee from Bank Bali<sup>14</sup> to collect a 904 billion Rupiah debt from two failed nationalised banks. More than half of the collection was commission. That alone was not the issue. As a matter of fact, who will pay the debt of the defunct ‘nationalised’ banks to Bank Bali, which is in need of re-capitalization? Since the debtors collapsed and closed under government supervision, the so called inter-bank claims would have to be made good from public funds. The ‘fee’ too must come from public funds.

It is alleged that the then ‘fee’ was earmarked by Golkar to pay bribes to parliamentarians to ensure the incumbent president Habibie’s election. The scandal appears to threaten what little recovery there was in Indonesia. In the last week of August, the World Bank threatened to freeze aid. Immediately after that, IMF (which has the US \$49 billion bailout package) said that Indonesia was courting

an economic disaster over its handling of the scandal.

The FDI confidence rankings in Table 6 do not indicate a likely FDI surge in the economies affected by the crisis. Thus, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand have ranks much higher than China and India, which are potentially large markets with a billion people each. The rankings in the table are about where the investors wish to go and not where they have already gone. The medium term outlook for the ASEAN regional economies in the post crisis period thus must still be considered unclear.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the comments made above, relatively more recent evidence on the estimates of GDP growth seem to provide room for optimism about the medium term prospects for the region. The data in Table 7 indicate that Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand are on a comfortable recovery track, while Indonesia’s achievement in 1999 has been limited to preventing the steep downturn of the previous year. There is no doubt what-so-ever that the new democratically elected regime in Indonesia faces formidable challenges on many fronts.

15. One might contrast the FDI confidence rankings with the World Economic Forum rankings of competitiveness. In that ranking, the positions are quite different: China has a rank (32) below Singapore (1), Malaysia (16) and Thailand (30), while India’s rank (52) is below that of Indonesia (37). What is indicated by the competitiveness index? The following is illuminating: ‘...our guiding principle is to construct an index that is correlated with economic growth over a time horizon of five years. In our index, competitive countries

Whatever the validity or otherwise of the current mood of optimism, changes in the development paradigm are underway. It will be quite a while for the region’s major economies to re-invent the growth miracle within the framework of emerging values of democracy and transparent accountability.<sup>16</sup>

are those that have the underlying economic conditions to achieve rapid economic growth for a number of years’ (*Year in Review* by Jeffrey Sachs and Andrew Warner, 1999 *World Competitiveness Report*, Geneva: World Economic Forum, p. 14). Inevitably, therefore, industrialized economies such as U.S., Canada, Switzerland, U.K., Netherlands, Finland, Australia, N.Z., Japan and Norway are in the top 15 places in the ‘competitiveness’ ranking. These very countries are the ones that invest in developing countries. Entrepreneurs in these countries have contributed responses, which are the basis for the FDI confidence rankings. Those rankings, therefore, have relatively greater significance for the medium term growth of the developing economies. They are also close to the market growth rankings in the competitiveness report (ibid, p. 17).

16. The values are part of the ‘Comprehensive Development Paradigm’ that the World Bank is expounding and is also what is now widely known as the Washington Consensus. In the words of the World Bank President, the content of the paradigm is as follows: ‘What it basically says is that when you look at a country, you cannot just look at fiscal or monetary policy, macroeconomic policy, exchange rates and budgets. You have to look at that, but if you have to get a complete picture, you must look at its legal structure, its governance... whether it works, is solid, decent, or if it is affected by corruption. You have to see if it has a financial structure that works, that regulates banks and public markets... You have to look at social safety nets and until you have got that, the structural elements, you really do not know much about the country... Then you have to look at the elements that go into development, that includes educational systems, knowledge transfer, water, power, transportation, communications, urban and rural projects, environment, all of which we have got there. It is not just that, it must be a list that should be set by the country itself. It should have its own priorities. But these are social priorities, structural priorities, and what we have learned is that if we try and bring about development without looking at those issues, you will waste a lot of money and you won’t be effective.’ See the interview in *The Hindu*, 23 May 1999.

14. Not too long ago, Bank Bali, with such reputed shareholders as the United Overseas Bank of Singapore and Sanwa Bank of Japan, was Indonesia’s most highly regarded retail banking institution.

# The political dimensions

V JAYANTH

FROM being adversaries on opposite sides of the great political divide during the Cold War era, India and her Southeast Asian neighbours began to review and re-examine their relationship in the 1990s. It was not accidental that the blossoming of the India-ASEAN ties coincided with two major developments – the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the policy of economic liberalisation set in motion by the P.V.Narasimha Rao-Manmohan Singh duo from 1991-92, following the deep economic crisis that gripped India.

Both India and ASEAN became conscious of the potential in enhanced political, economic and security co-operation. With the reforms in place and the attractions of the East Asian miracle, New Delhi envisaged great possibilities in forging closer equations in her eastern neighbourhood as foreign minister, P.V.Narasimha Rao fashioned what has come to be called the 'Look East' policy. His successor in the Ministry of External Affairs, Inder Kumar Gujral, found merit in this policy leading to a sharpening of focus on ASEAN.

The two sides were willing and ready to jettison the historical baggage of the Cold War era and look to a new and dynamic partnership. India was no longer a part of the Soviet bloc and ASEAN was not clinging onto the coat-tails of the U.S. It could see enormous potential in trade and investment ties with India now that New Delhi was ready to embrace free market economics. There was a realization that decision making in India was

largely political with even economic ties determined by political equations.

Developments during the Cambodian crisis provided a major opportunity for ASEAN and its member states to observe India more closely and increase interaction with her at the official and political levels. As chair of the International Commission on Cambodia, India played a key role in resolving the Khmer crisis and worked closely with ASEAN and the West to negotiate the Paris Conference and treaty that resulted in an international agreement on Cambodia in 1991. This paved the way for a greater U.N. role in facilitating Cambodia's return to the international arena and its subsequent experiments with democracy. India played a leading role in holding and monitoring the first ever democratic election in the Kingdom in 1993.

With these developments and a congenial climate for fostering closer ties, India and ASEAN took a fresh look at each other. From the very beginning, it was Singapore that clearly saw India's potential. During the 1992 ASEAN summit hosted by the city state, India was taken on as a Sectoral Dialogue partner. Four specific sectors were identified for cooperation, but these were incidental. It was to be the beginning of a new and mutually beneficial relationship between Southeast Asia and the sub-continent. But even then, internal conflicts and political crosscurrents in ASEAN were discernible. When Singapore proposed India for sectoral dialogue partnership, some others like Malaysia and Indonesia for ins-

tance, wanted Pakistan to be given the same treatment. Consequently, ASEAN decided to take on both the South Asian neighbours as sectoral dialogue partners.

What happened since then is part of history. Thanks to the personal chemistry that the Rao-Singh combine created with the ASEAN leaders and some substantive diplomacy and constructive dialogue that the MEA brought in to play from 1992, a new equation blossomed in just three years.

**A**t the very next ASEAN summit in Bangkok in December 1995, the Southeast Asian leaders decided it was time to graduate India to a Full Dialogue partner status from 1996. India was so inducted at the July 1996 annual Asean ministerial conference in Jakarta. This despite the fact that Narasimha Rao's Congress(I) had lost power during that period and a United Front regime under H.D. Deve Gowda assumed office with I.K. Gujral as the foreign minister. But it cannot be denied that the credit for fashioning this policy and promoting the equation with ASEAN must go to Narasimha Rao and his government. The successors realized the potential and usefulness of this partnership and have contributed to its evolution over the past five years.

In sharp contrast, ASEAN's equations with Pakistan did not flower into a partnership. Despite some campaign tours, undertaken first by Benazir Bhutto and then Nawaz Sharif, Islamabad could not get its friends like Malaysia, Indonesia or Brunei to persuade ASEAN to grant Pakistan the dialogue partner status that India had won.

Since 1995, India-ASEAN ties have really gained momentum. It is not merely economic cooperation or trade and investment that set the ball rolling. Without saying so openly,

many Southeast Asian governments saw India as a key balancing factor in the Asian equilibrium.

There were many signals to suggest that the U.S. would not always hold the balance in favour of East Asia if it developed problems with China – the region's 'Big Brother'. Though there was no getting away from the security partnership with Washington that provided about 100,000 American troops to be stationed in East Asia to meet any eventuality, ASEAN sensed that the U.S. had its own agenda and would be guided purely by its own economic and security interests in the region.

Therefore, ASEAN decided to cultivate India and build a new partnership with its western neighbour who could possibly match China's potential, both economically and militarily over the long term. New Delhi's policy of non alignment was a plus point in its favour. So ASEAN had no difficulty in working closely with India in regional and international fora.

**W**hat does a dialogue partnership mean and what benefits can it bring India? Not many here understand the full import of this relationship. When the Southeast Asian nations got together and consolidated a regional forum, they foresaw that their future lay in forging closer economic, political and security cooperation with key major players in the world. As an extension of the ASEAN experiment, they introduced the concept of 'dialogue partnership' with major trade partners and immediate neighbours to institutionalize a mechanism for cooperation.

Japan, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, and the U.S. were in the priority list for this status and dialogue was first initiated with them. Because of the importance of human resource

development and funding of major development projects, the UNDP was also welcomed as a partner for ASEAN. Canada and the European Union were later additions. After that phase, China, India and Russia were granted dialogue partner status in 1996. There have been no additions to that list since.

**I**n its scheme of things, ASEAN holds an annual ministerial meeting in July every year. At the end of its internal, regional consultation, it invites the dialogue partners for reviewing developments. This takes place in three ways. First, there is a security dialogue through the Asean Regional Forum (ARF), which has become a security architecture and platform for the Asia Pacific region. Second, there is an ASEAN dialogue partners meeting held in an informal way. And finally, the ASEAN 10 holds individual consultations and interaction with each of the dialogue partners. Now that India has entrenched itself in the ASEAN forum, it is time that it begins to play a role in shaping the course of events in the Asia Pacific region on the economic, political and security fronts.

It was certainly a pity that India could not convince the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC) to take it on as a member when the expansion took place in 1998. Vietnam, Peru and Russia were admitted as new members to swell APEC's membership to 21, along with a freeze for the next 10 years. Analysts are convinced that India failed to secure membership because the U.S. and other member states like Malaysia were lukewarm to the idea. Now that a new and strategic partnership with the U.S. seems to be evolving, things may change even in APEC. Since India does not belong to any credible and influential trade blocs as yet, its

entry into APEC may be a desirable course, even if it has to wait it out for another five to eight years

Undeterred by the setback, India continued to build on its ties with ASEAN. The entry of Vietnam, Laos and Myanmar into the fold has added depth and meaning to this partnership. Apart from the maritime boundaries it shares with many ASEAN friends, India has a long land boundary with Myanmar, which is a strategic neighbour to befriend.

**E**ssentially, it is the economic indicators that determine ties with ASEAN. India's trade with Southeast Asia has grown rapidly since 1992, crossing the \$6 billion mark. There was a setback due to the East Asian economic crisis that gripped the region in July 1997. Even then, it was only Indian exports to the region that slipped. Many ASEAN countries have increased their exports to India thanks to a substantial devaluation of their currencies and consequently due to more competitive prices. Historically and traditionally, Singapore and Malaysia have been closer to India in trade and remain the major trading partners. But Thailand and Indonesia have emerged as key players and witnessed a steady growth in their trade with India during the past five years. This trend is likely to continue.

Historically and politically, India has played a significant role in the Indochina region. Unfortunately, the political investment made in that part of Southeast Asia during the 1950s to 1970s was not followed up with economic interaction in the subsequent decades. This had stymied the relationship to an extent, though the warmth in political equations with Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia continues to this day.

There have been a series of high level visits from India and by ASEAN

leaders to India in the 1990s. President R. Venkataraman and Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao undertook key visits to Southeast Asia in the early 1990s. I.K. Gujral followed it up. The BJP's Foreign Minister, Jaswant Singh, has had occasion to interact more closely and frequently with his ASEAN counterparts during his brief tenure till now. Similarly, leaders from ASEAN have utilized every opportunity to visit India. From ousted President Suharto of Indonesia to Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad of Malaysia, many of them have visited India since 1992. The list includes Singapore's Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, who came twice in successive years, the former Philippine President, Fidel Ramos, and the Prime Minister of Laos, Khamtay Siphandone, not to leave out the retired General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam, Do Moi.

**B**ut it must be accepted that India does not enjoy the same degree of warmth or friendship with all its ASEAN friends. Singapore, Vietnam and Laos will remain at the top of the list, unless New Delhi does something to spoil the special equations that currently exist. With the advent of President S.R. Nathan in Singapore, who is as India-friendly as his Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, the stage is set to impart a fresh momentum to bilateral relations. It is upto the new government in Delhi to cement this partnership to provide a model to others in the region during the current millennium. After Goh's visit to India in January, this partnership should now blossom.

Thailand, Indonesia, Cambodia and Brunei may not be as friendly with India as the first three when it comes to a crunch. But they can at the least remain neutral. It is unfortunate that Thailand's Foreign Minister, Surin Pitsuan, does not share the warmth for

India; nor do his finance and trade ministers. Thailand is currently the chair, and its foreign minister the chairman of ASEAN's standing committee for the year.

**N**ow that a new and more democratic government has taken charge in Indonesia, equations are bound to change. The new President, Abdurrahman Wahid, has already signaled his interest in both India and China. His Vice President, Megawati Sukarnoputri, who has age and popularity on her side to be his successor, can also be counted among India's friends in the region. (Incidentally, the late Biju Patnaik named her Megawati because she was born as her father was being flown to safety in India in a special aircraft.)

In shaping its ties with ASEAN in the 21st century, India must focus closely on Malaysia, Myanmar and the Philippines. While the rest of ASEAN remained stoically silent during India's nuclear tests in 1998, the Philippines chose to orchestrate a campaign against New Delhi on the basis of its anti-nuclear policy. Many considered it to be at the behest of Japan, but the way Manila behaved during the 1998 Asean conference it hosted has resulted in a setback to bilateral ties. This needs to be addressed in the short and medium term.

There has been a thaw in relations with Yangon. But its military junta remains conscious of India's support to the pro democracy movement led by Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi. This will remain a sticky point in ties between the two countries, as also the fact that India does not want to be seen forging too close a relationship with a military regime, even if it be the government of the day.

The future lies in dealing effectively with the government in power to protect India's security interests in

the region, particularly because of the close equations between Yangon and Beijing. Without going out of the way to champion democracy in Myanmar, India can let its people and organizations do the talking to promote democracy in that country.

**A**s for Malaysia, relations will remain complex till Mahathir Mohamad remains in power, and he has just won another five year mandate. In his attempt to be 'more Malay than the Malays', Mahathir, who has ruled since 1981, wants economic cooperation with India without stepping onto a political equation. While persisting with the present policy of engagement and increased trade cooperation with Kuala Lumpur, it would be worthwhile to wait and see who will be the successor in Malaysia before moving towards that elusive partnership. Though the former foreign minister, Abdullah Badawi continues to be the deputy prime minister (after Anwar Ibrahim's ouster in 1998), the last word on the succession issue has not been said.

There are any number of opportunities and occasions for India to engage ASEAN in a constant and constructive dialogue on a variety of issues that are of mutual interest. Apart from the annual ASEAN meetings, they overlap in other platforms too. For instance, the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IORARC) seeks to bond the entire Indian Ocean community together to further economic and political cooperation. Many of ASEAN's members are a part of this forum.

In an attempt to bring ASEAN closer to South Asia, a new Bay of Bengal community christened the Bangladesh India Myanmar Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) forum was launched three years ago. As Thailand's Deputy

Foreign Minister, Sukhumbhand Paribatra, noted in one of his lectures\*, it is the 'consensus approach' which has kept ASEAN going. And it is only by adopting that approach that ASEAN-South Asia cooperation can also be promoted. BIMSTEC can be the beginning of both an ASEAN-SAARC partnership and a potential Bay of Bengal community that has so much in common. Paribatra explains this approach thus: 'First, deliberate avoidance of addressing issues considered too divisive and second, deliberate procrastination in putting forward for deliberation new issues considered too controversial.'

India has often followed a policy of adopting a low profile at most of the regional and international forums, unless issues of national interest are at stake. Instead of being weighed down by such a policy, New Delhi must be more forthcoming to seize opportunities that the dialogue with ASEAN offers. Without appearing to be overbearing or big brotherly, India must push its own agenda so long as it does not clash with ASEAN's.

**B**esides utilizing the platform provided by ASEAN, India must also institutionalize its bilateral, consultative mechanisms with some of these countries. The Singapore example may be worth following. The ministries of foreign affairs of India and Singapore have set up an annual dialogue at the official level to discuss bilateral, regional and international issues of concern. A similar mechanism can be tried with Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. The Joint Commission meetings and consultative committees with

\*At a seminar in New Delhi in December 1995, under the joint auspices of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, India International Centre and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. Paribatra was not a deputy minister at that time, but represented the Institute of Strategic and International Studies, Bangkok.

other countries must be held with regularity to maintain the interaction.

Once India-ASEAN links are strengthened and consolidated, it may be useful to focus on ASEAN-SAARC ties, both politically and economically. Since India and South Asia do not find a place in any of the major trade blocs that have taken shape till now, the real alternative will be to work together with fellow Asian countries on issues of mutual concern.

**F**or instance, the reform of the UN, the future direction of the WTO and the evolution of a new world order are areas in which both ASEAN and SAARC can work together to forge a consensus. ASEAN has already set up a dialogue with Australia and New Zealand, the European Commission and NAFTA (North American Free Trade Area), basically to promote trade and investments. It may be equally important to promote greater understanding and regular consultations between Southeast and South Asia.

Just as India decided to Look East, Southeast Asia wanted to focus its attention to the West. Apart from India and South Asia, many of the ASEAN countries are looking at Central Asia and Southern Africa for the future. This can be converted into a lasting partnership. Just as India can utilize the expertise of ASEAN countries to tap the potential in Indochina or the Philippines, the ASEAN countries can tie up with India to do business with Central and West Asia, as well as Southern Africa.

ASEAN politicians and officials are fond of describing a useful partnership as a 'win-win' situation – where both sides stand to gain. By cementing ties with ASEAN on the political, economic and security fronts, and making a success of its Look East policy, India will be laying a strong foundation for the next millennium.

# Books

**INDIA'S NUCLEAR BOMB: The Impact on Global Proliferation** by George Perkovich. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2000 (originally published by the University of California Press, 1999).

**A NUCLEAR STRATEGY FOR INDIA** by Raja Menon. Sage (forthcoming), New Delhi.

**SOUTH ASIA ON A SHORT FUSE: Nuclear Politics and the Future of Global Disarmament** by Praful Bidwai and Achin Vanaik. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999.

**THE MAKING OF THE ATOMIC BOMB: Science, Secrecy and the Postcolonial State** by Itty Abraham. Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 1998.

THERE was a dire need for a dispassionate historical analysis of the Indian nuclear weapons programme. This need has now been met by George Perkovich's book, a detailed, lengthy (almost 600 pages) and meticulously researched account of India's five decades old campaign to achieve, what the Government of India chooses to call, 'strategic autonomy'. He relies on official archival material including recently declassified US documents and discussions with American decision makers in Washington, on access to strategically placed Indian officials, both serving and retired, and the literature to-date, to chart the accretion in India's technical competence and the evolution of its nuclear policy. The resulting study is authoritative.

India's progress in the nuclear realm was steady rather than spectacular, relying on foreign technical help and assistance in the initial stages and, in the context of the ongoing, roller-coaster nature of Indo-US bilateral relations, it was subject to the ever-changing attitudes of Washington which variously contextualized

the contentious 'non proliferation' issues within the parameters of the Cold War with Soviet Russia, containment of China, retention of influence in Pakistan and currying goodwill with New Delhi. On this side, the decisions by Indira Gandhi to test in 1974 and then to forego follow-on tests, and in the mid '90s by P.V. Narasimha Rao to postpone testing until a more propitious time, were all made within a penumbra of fear of adverse American reaction owing to the belief that India would not or could not survive full-fledged economic sanctions. All this is fleshed out in great detail by Perkovich.

But his most significant finding is that the Indian nuclear programme's thrust from early on was to attain weapons capability which, while being a matter of some dispute in intellectual circles in India, was never really in doubt – a conclusion earlier reached by Itty Abraham in his book as well. Perkovich, moreover, provides sufficient evidence to show that Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's efforts on behalf of disarmament and arms control were at least as much motivated by idealism as by the need to provide an effective diplomatic and political cover for Homi Bhabha's securing the nuclear weapons wherewithal for the country.

Then again, Perkovich, in tune with the current US policy, is an ardent anti-proliferationist, and it shows. For instance, he makes the standard case that the relatively huge investment in the nuclear sector for a developing country like India amounted to an uneconomical use of scarce resources. This is unconvincing because he does not balance the costs (opportunity and otherwise) with the net gain in security for the country and in its freedom of action in the international arena.

Perkovich refers to Bhabha's original nuclear programme blueprint with interlocking phases – the reliance on natural uranium reactors in the first phase producing the plutonium for use as cladding for the



thorium fuel in breeder reactors in the second phase, which in turn would produce the feedstock of plutonium (Pu239) for advanced pressurized water reactors in the third phase – as ‘quixotic’. That this architecture was based on the fact of the largest thorium reserves in the world, or that it allowed for a planned escape from the more expensive enriched uranium cycle and, importantly, the pale of American pressure into the more versatile and more affordable ‘plutonium economy’, has apparently not impressed the author. More correctly, however, he urges India to jettison the ‘colonial framework’ of foreign policy decision making. But this advice can cut both ways. It can justify India’s being accommodative on CTBT and FMCT and aggressively assertive in pursuing its national interest independent of any other consideration.

Perkovich does not, in the main permit his prejudices to colour his judgements. He is thorough in dissecting the politico-military arguments made in Washington over the years and in scrutinising the self-serving nature of statements and often confused and confusing nuclear policies emanating from New Delhi in the same period upto the May 1998 tests. And in the concluding chapter, among other things, he rejects the position of the five established Nuclear Weapons States that there is no relationship between vertical proliferation they indulge in and horizontal proliferation they resist, calling it ‘the grandest illusion of the nuclear age.’ He thus espies little prospect of genuine disarmament or ‘unproliferation’ – his inelegant neologism for the ‘rollback’ option.

The duo of self-confessed ‘anti nuclear activists’, Praful Bidwai and Achin Vanaik, on the other hand, seem a little too intent on pamphleteering to care much about making their case sensibly, with less tilted analysis. The book revolves around their discovery that the gradual emergence of a more ‘communal’ and ‘nationalistic’ India, owing to the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party and the alleged spread of RSS ideology in the body politic, is what led to the Indian government’s forsaking disarmament commitments of yore and nuclear weaponising. The consequences of this, they maintain, is that peace is at risk in the country, the region and the world at-large, as are the objectives of international arms control and disarmament. As a uncausal theory, it is on par with attributing sunrise to a cock’s crowing.

Besides, their interpretation of what happened and why in the nuclear sphere is relentlessly skewed, the aim seemingly being to prove that India today is all but a rogue state, having done absolutely nothing

right or above board since the fifties when it championed *the* cause, eventuating in the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty. Thereafter, according to Messrs Bidwai and Vanaik, the national elite’s sensibilities suffered a progressive ‘coarsening’, which apparently has reached its acme with the assumption of power at the centre by the Bharatiya Janata Party, consequent upon which India’s political stock along with its standing in the international moral firmament, has taken a dive.

This denouement has come to pass, they argue, because successive Indian governments departed from the high-minded abhorrence of nuclear weapons displayed by Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru. Considering that contrary evidence of the kind Abraham and Perkovich offer that Nehru was at heart a ‘realist’ (a dirty word in Bidwai and Vanaik’s political lexicon) and encouraged the acquisition of nuclear weapons capabilities, was available to them (Abraham’s book is cited by them in footnotes) it is a surprise that the authors did not bung Nehru in with the rest of the villains and date the country’s slide to the Mahatma’s assassination in 1948!

How thoroughly unbalanced their ‘analysis’ is may be indicated by some of their views. They refer, for example, to the evolution of the Indian nuclear policy as ‘historical degeneration’ and the supplanting of the do-nothing policy of non-weaponised deterrence by overt nuclearisation as ‘destroying the middle ground’, as if the ‘middle ground’ had, with the passage of time and the ever-changing international correlation of forces, any middle or even ground left to it; describe China’s transfer of nuclear weapons designs and production blueprints to Pakistan and its reported offer of the Lop Nor facilities to test a Pakistani-crafted weapon as only a ‘secondary factor’ in the latter’s acquisition of weapons capabilities; believe that this Sino-Pakistan nuclear nexus is a commercial, not a ‘strategic’, relationship; contend that the Indian nuclear programme is ‘a standing disgrace’; dismiss Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s outline of an Indian deterrence policy as worthless; declare that while the Indian polity has become steadily more ‘anti democratic and authoritarian’, the direction of its Pakistani counterpart is towards ‘a less military-controlled system’ – which must come as a revelation to the General Musharraf-ruled Pakistanis; aver that the potential of nuclear coercion by a nuclear armed state against a country not similarly equipped is a ‘myth’, which must mean that they read the USS Enterprise task force’s mission in the Bay of Bengal in 1971, as benign; decry the ‘pernicious role’ of Indian scientists, especially

Bhabha; champion the notion that a nuclearised India has endangered not only the extant nonproliferation order but the prevailing international 'norms of restraint' as well; and, to top it all, advocate 'external encouragement, if not intervention to defuse India-Pakistan nuclear rivalry'.

Such an account is grist for the already converted but is unlikely to influence a wider public, notwithstanding the case being made on the presumed 'immorality' of nuclear weapons and hence the need to do away with them altogether. As far as ethics and the imperatives of state action are concerned, Bidwai and Vanaik are votaries of 'feel good' politics represented by an Arundhati Roy and her ilk and, therefore, the essential point that the larger public good of interstate peace or absence of war is willy-nilly served by nuclear weapons, escapes them. They disregard the fact that it is precisely the extent of promised devastation that stayed nuclear weapons from being used in the Cold War, which condition of grace is likely to obtain in South Asia too (short of a racist view being taken, that unlike the Americans, Europeans and the Chinese, behaving rationally and reasonably with nuclear weapons is beyond Indians and Pakistanis, which the authors come very close to voicing). Considering the end, of peace ensuing from a system of mutual deterrence, are the means (nuclear weapons) really so reprehensible? After you cut out the pontifications and the blather, where lies higher morality?

If *Short Fuse* has no bang, Abraham's study is a packet of dynamite. While no more enthusiastic about nuclear weapons than Bidwai and Vanaik, Abraham approaches the subject of India's acquiring Bomb making capabilities in terms of the premise of high science legitimating not only the endeavours and strivings of a newly independent state but as also validating the 'scientific method' to realise a modern state, these being the terms of reference adopted by the country's founding leaders. This is a sophisticated political and sociological analysis, using George Basalla's typology, of a developing nation seeking to transit from the backwaters of 'colonial science' into the international scientific mainstream. That this transition in India's case was being attempted at a time when science was becoming 'nationalised' meant that the progenitors of the nuclear energy programme in the country, chiefly Prime Minister Nehru and Homi Bhabha, right from the beginning yoked it to the cause of national security, as was being done elsewhere. The author successfully proves that secrecy and the apparatus of state to exercise it were key instruments in this policy.

Nehru's rhetoric about science as panacea for underdevelopment and Bhabha's big promises on this score are juxtaposed by the author against the reality wherein the country lacked even the basic wherewithal for doing science. The 1948 Atomic Energy Act and its still more draconian successor Act of 1962, promulgated incidentally before the Himalayan War with China, Abraham contends, afforded the cloak of secrecy behind which to build up a scientific and technological infrastructure from the ground up and the required corpus of skills and competencies without fear of exposure that the cupboard was bare to begin with. And once this was done, to mask the weaponising thrust of the programme which became the primary mission after the twin objective of using the atom as source of electricity began, for various reasons, to loose steam.

The author points out how Bhabha well exploited the opportunities provided by the Cold War international politics to acquire help and assistance in terms of designs, hardware, nuclear fuel, heavy water and other nuclear materials and training from the British, French, Canadian and American sources to further his three stage long term plan configured to make India at once self sufficient in energy and security. Also significant was the role played by the constant goading of Meghnad Saha, Bhabha's great rival in national scientific circles, in publicly pushing the Atomic Energy programme to deliver on what he believed were exaggerated promises. Bhabha, with Nehru's blessings, so structured the Atomic Energy Commission, the Department of Atomic Energy, and the numerous institutes at Trombay and elsewhere as to centralise all decision making and authority in himself and to minimize public accountability.

Ironically, this system was turned against weaponising by his successor, Vikram Sarabhai who, as Abraham shows, was interested basically in building up the country's space capabilities. Sarabhai slowed down the programmatic thrust toward nuclear testing and weaponisation which would have helped India cross the Rubicon by 1967 at the latest. It was not until another change of guard and the return to power of the Bhabha school – with Homi Sethna taking over leadership of the nuclear establishment after Sarabhai's death in 1971, that the weaponisation scheme got back on track.

Given China's thermonuclear test in that year, India's decision to test and speedily weaponise would have met with general approval and ensconced India in the rank of the nuclear haves prior to the 1968 Non-proliferation Treaty. It might have spared the country,

what retired Rear Admiral Raja Menon calls, the 'late fees for strategic delays', the hard options and arm-twisting it faces today. The importance of the man at the helm and the wages of indecision following Nehru and Bhabha's deaths, and in the wake of the 1974 breakthrough test, are brought out starkly by the Abraham study. It has lessons for this country at the turn of the century when the government has again to make a vital decision, whether to test further and weaponise effectively or to subside into unequal CTBT and FMCT regimes, thus imperilling the country's future security.

Menon's book is a full and commendable treatment of the subject by a straight-talking military man. It's no-nonsense worldview and attitude, encased in crisp and clear language, are refreshing. For instance, he calls India's international behaviour 'extraordinarily timid'; he is contemptuous of the tendency of the Indian politician to 'exhibit his penchant for noise and declaratory policies'; he excoriates the incompetent naval leadership and 'bureaucratic bungling' for the plight of the nuclear-powered submarine project and rues the fact that the three services have ceded their prerogatives in the matter of nuclear force planning and strategy to the civilians. This kind of candour also makes for very definite views.

His take on western deterrence history and concepts is unexceptionable and his account of the evolution of the Indian nuclear policy is racy and readable, if a little weak in many of the details and wrong in some of its essentials (like his view that Nehru's pacifism gave an exclusively 'peaceful' spin to the Indian policy) — shortfalls that stand out when set alongside the more intensively researched analysis and conclusions contained in the books by Perkovich and Abraham. But a few of the theses he propounds are of a questionable nature, for example, his contention that emphasis on 'territorial defence' weakens deterrence. But these are made up by his more numerous insights. Like the Admiral's well-rounded view that because strategy is a function of 'the technology trajectory', as technology advances so would the force structure, compelling a change in strategy, which puts the current debate on 'minimum credible deterrence' in perspective. What may be necessary by way of a deterrent force today could become redundant, if not a liability, tomorrow, whence the need for India zealously to protect its strategic independence and freedom of action.

The real value of this study, however, lies elsewhere. In attempting to mathematize deterrence and apply the resulting calculus to the security needs of this

country, Menon, a navigator whilst in service and hence at ease with numbers, offers a distinct, workable, model for planning a force and for organizing a nuclear command and control system. He bases the former on figures, equations, estimates and similar 'hard' data and the latter, more usefully, on the existing corpus of Standard Operating Procedures, drills and norms in the military. Consideration of these aspects, worked out in considerable detail, is helped by a slew of graphs, diagrams, and organization and flow charts. As an illustrative exercise, he even draws up the NSRs (Nuclear Staff Requirements) for an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile.

After assessing the nuclear threats posed by China and Pakistan and with the aim 'stabilizing deterrence' (i.e., avoiding launch on warning or launch under attack postures) at the lowest level of retaliatory strike capability, the Admiral is of the view that long range missiles, rendered rail mobile and housed underground, would be adequate against China in the medium term. But, given the rapid progress in detection and surveillance technologies, that eventually the Indian deterrent may have to go the way of the British and the French in becoming exclusively submarine-based by 2030 with upto 380 MIRV (Multiple Independently-targetable Re-entry Vehicles) warheads. As far as Pakistan is concerned the author believes that almost any combination of short range options is destabilising and that the best alternative would be to alight on confidence building measures to secure a high level of verifiability. To achieve this last, he proposes such things as 'sanitizing' a wide swath on either side of the border and electronically tagging stored or deployed missiles. Of course, this model of triadic deterrence stability is predicated on India, China and Pakistan agreeing on a certain minimum level of transparency and asymmetry in force levels and quality, neither of which may be forthcoming.

But there are several other problems with this book. Menon's professional military knowledge and reading of the situation, while eventuating in some very deft analysis also lead to the occasional alarmingly wrong conclusion. He insists for reasons of adverse payoffs, for example, that Pakistan's seeking to convert 'territorial defeat into nuclear victory or nuclear stalemate' is 'a perfectly daft idea'. Daft or not, this is believed to be the Pakistani doctrine and the certainty of response should Indian land forces effect a breakthrough is what India will have to prepare for.

This payoffs business, moreover, is fine in game theoretic terms but points up the central weakness in

the Admiral's methodology. Lacking an empirical basis, the figures ascribed to payoffs in various matrices that the author has articulated are no more than 'top of the head' numbers, intuitively assigned to give a veneer of certitude to what is essentially a speculative exercise. The downside of this is that figures impress the politicians and the public alike more than expressions of historical intuition and that this can end up in dangerous strategic postures and policies. Such, in any case, was the argument made by Bernard Brodie heading the intuitionist school in the controversy dating back to the fifties in the US when criticizing the efforts of the group led by his RAND colleague, Albert Wohlstetter, which was involved in working out the probabilities of this or that contingency occurring and accordingly recommending the build-up of strategic forces. Brodie's argument is still valid.

And, finally, a suggestion for the Admiral that he consider revising his last chapter on international environment in light of a host of late developments relating to the CTBT, Clinton's visit, and so on. Otherwise his book, presumably slated for release in mid to late 2000, will appear stale even as it hits the book shops.

**Bharat Karnad**

**THE ASEAN REGION IN INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY** by Kripa Sridharan. Dartmouth Publishing Company, Aldershot, U.K., 1996.

**INDIA AND SOUTHEAST ASIA: Challenges and Opportunities** edited by Baladas Ghoshal. Konark Publishers, New Delhi, 1996.

**THE FUTURE OF THE ARF** edited by Koo How San. Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, 1999.

THE end of the Cold War in 1991 coincided with a Congress government headed by Narasimha Rao coming to power in India. The global environment had changed with the emergence of new regional complexities. No longer was the world simplistically divided into blocs with India espousing the cause of non-alignment. Three trends were clearly in evidence. First, the truly colossal impact of a process referred to loosely, and often trivially, as globalization. It is still unclear what results the interaction of globalization with the nation state will produce. However, the process of deterioration and loss of control – at the state level – seems difficult to reverse.

The crisis in the East Asian financial markets is just one example of this process.

The second trend, a broadening of the security discourse, was not unrelated to the process of globalization. Security is no longer viewed just in terms of protecting the state's security and territorial integrity from external aggression. A wider, more comprehensive view of security to encompass international as well as national interests has established itself. In this view, national and international security policies need to be more sensitive to the non-military threats that states and the international society face because of the complex patterns of interdependence.

Finally, there seemed to be a movement towards multipolarity although, as of today, there still is no clear challenge to American power. The rise of China and the consequences it will have for the international system, and particularly Asia, will depend on whether Beijing will, like the great powers in the past, seek to rewrite the rules of the game or act differently by accepting the status quo, arguably in the interests of peace in the region. In other words, it is still a period of great uncertainty.

These trends had their strategic implications on India's foreign policy, starting from 1991. It is too early to gauge the long term impact of this changing, uncertain world on the *Weltanschauung* of India, yet attempts have been made by several experts, Indian and foreign, to do so. This article reviews some of these writings. There had been some awareness of the significance of Southeast Asian states, particularly the ASEAN, in economic, strategic and political terms. But it was only when Cold War perceptions were no longer valid and ASEAN, in the words of its permanent representative in the UN, emerged as 'the most successful regional organization in the Third World,' that India started developing a policy framework towards it.

Indian leaders realized that India was the only regional power left out in the cold when others, far less important, were involved in deciding the future course of action in its extended neighbourhood. Though trade and investment with ASEAN is now increasing rapidly, it at the political level that India needs friends to ensure that it becomes a key actor in the Asia-Pacific region. It is a positive sign that the largest Muslim country in the world, Indonesia, is making efforts at closer cooperation with India. In the past, India's proximity to the Soviet Union and a perceived threat from China had acted as deterrents to such gestures from the Southeast Asian countries.

The Indian overtures and the ASEAN display of interest during Rao's government were welcomed by these countries leading to a debate in Indian academia regarding the steps to be taken towards better cooperation. The Rao initiative had an immediate and successful fallout with India becoming a sectoral dialogue partner of ASEAN in January 1992 and a full dialogue partner in December 1995. In July 1996, India became a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). As a result, it interacts with ASEAN which now includes all ten countries of Southeast Asia in various bodies and meetings. According to an assessment, ASEAN hosts some 300 meetings a year.

After the exit of Rao, preoccupation with internal political uncertainty and militancy in Kashmir led to a hiatus, and a period of inactivity ensued. The question that arises is why it took so long for a country the size of India, which has historical, cultural, land and maritime borders with Southeast Asia, to arrive at its Look East policy? The answer can be found in Kripa Sridharan's *The ASEAN Region in India's Foreign Policy*, a well researched, detailed study that competently analyses India's foreign policy towards ASEAN from 1967 to the early 1990s.

The author identifies four main factors in determining the 'convergence and dissonance' in India's relationship with ASEAN. These are (i) maintenance of territorial integrity and sovereignty; (ii) relations with major powers, i.e. the US, the erstwhile USSR and China; (iii) close and warm relations with Vietnam; and (iv) post Cold War concerns to expand its economic relations with ASEAN. Sridharan explains the evolution and progress of India's relations with the ASEAN states, and its blow hot, blow cold foreign policy, by characterizing the India-ASEAN linkage as a 'derived relationship'. This relationship, according to Sridharan, is of secondary interest, as it is derived from India's primary interests, and it is this trend of relationship that has dictated India's interaction with the ASEAN, for 'in a derived relationship actions often take the form of minor and sometimes clumsy readjustments.'

To China and Japan this region is of primary strategic concern and as significant today as it was in the past, while to India the sub-region has always been of secondary importance. India's security perceptions chiefly include its immediate neighborhood and China. One agrees with Sridharan when she states that 'it has been India's prime concern to counter Chinese influence in the larger Southeast Asian region as in its own region.' Whenever India felt China's

influence on the increase in Southeast Asia, an immediate mobilization towards this region took place. The recent flurry of activity like the state visits from Singapore, Indonesia and Cambodia in one go is perhaps related to China giving a benign look to its policy vis-à-vis the ASEAN countries, particularly in its attempts at solving border problems with the states of Indo-China which have been India's traditional friends.

Sridharan's book reflects the general tenor of Ghoshal's edited *India and Southeast Asia* in stressing India's neglect of its Southeast Asian neighbours and thereby missing an opportunity for forging a meaningful relationship inspite of being connected through land and maritime borders. Sridharan's study, however, delves deeper into the evolution of India's foreign policy. Her scholarly analysis answers some fundamental questions like: How does India view the current climate in the ASEAN sub-region? How does this differ from its past perceptions? What are the strategies it has adopted to further its interests? What are its principal goals? What is India's perception of itself? Was its Look East policy credible enough to cope with the difficult 1990s and beyond? These questions are answered through an analysis of the objectives of India's foreign policy.

During India's decolonising period, Nehru took great interest in the Southeast Asian struggle for independence. Thus, in the 1940s and 1950s there was close rapport with the ASEAN states, while in the 1960s there was benign neglect. She has examined the creation of ASEAN in 1967 and India's perception of cooperation through such regional organizations. A chapter is devoted to competing proposals for regional order in Southeast Asia between 1969-71. This was the period of proposed withdrawal of the U.S. and the British from Southeast Asia, the clash between China and the Soviet Union on the Ussuri River in March 1969, and Sino-American rapprochement.

Obviously the ASEAN states, along with India and the Soviet Union, were worried about the future Chinese course in the region. The suggestion by the Soviet Union for an Asian collective security system motivated India to come up with its own proposals, which incidentally coincided. This identity of interests led many to believe that India was trying to promote the Soviet's cause in South and Southeast Asia, which went ill with the ASEAN perception of Soviet Russia. When it came to the ASEAN proposal for a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) in 1971, India endorsed it.

The 1972-76 period is discussed in the context of the Bangladesh crisis, which nudged India into signing the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation of 1971. This sent confusing signals to the ASEAN countries, who perceived India's views as 'closer to that of Hanoi and Moscow'. It was during this period that India requested for the status of a formal dialogue partnership with ASEAN in 1976. With the change of government in 1977, Sridharan comments, the ASEAN countries hoped that India's pro-Soviet stance under Indira Gandhi would end and that it could look towards 'genuine non-alignment'.

However, under the Janata Party rule (1977-79), Indian foreign policy did not undergo dramatic changes vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, though efforts were made to mend relations with China and in 1976 ambassadors were exchanged after a gap of 15 years. But the Chinese armed attack on Vietnam on 16 February 1979 while Foreign Minister Vajpayee was in Beijing caused considerable embarrassment to the Indian government. It also showed that China had not given up its aggressive policy towards its neighbours. Here again perceptions differed. ASEAN saw China's attack as a result of Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea, while India tried to equidistance itself from both. Sridharan writes, 'India's apparent tolerance of Vietnam's action was interpreted by these states as arising out of India's friendship with Moscow and hostility to China, leading them ultimately to put on hold India's request for an institutional relationship with the Association.'

1980-84 saw the return of Indira Gandhi. The biggest mistake of her regime, according to Sridharan and others in the book edited by Ghoshal, was the Indian decision to recognize 'the Hanoi installed Kampuchean regime in July 1980 which caused a misunderstanding between India and ASEAN states. The latter viewed Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and pro-Moscow Vietnam intervention in Kampuchea as a threat to the security of non-communist ASEAN states.' On the other hand, India viewed these interventions as a consequence of the US and Chinese activities, seen as 'far more destabilizing than the interventions by Vietnam or the Soviet Union.' Moreover, India's policy towards Southeast Asia was affected by its security perception in its own region where it viewed with alarm American 'supply of arms to Pakistan and the militarisation of the Indian Ocean region.'

After Indira Gandhi's assassination in October 1984, Rajiv Gandhi took over as prime minister and the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was inaugurated. The ASEAN states wel-

comed the formation of SAARC and hoped for co-operation with it. However, India's efforts at resolving the Kampuchean issue once again brought to the fore the differences between the ASEAN states' and India's security perceptions. India's continued closeness with Vietnam was not appreciated by them. Also, India's sending of a Peace Keeping Force to Sri Lanka, its military action in Maldives, and the naval build up was viewed with concern by the ASEAN countries. However, when V.P. Singh took over in November 1989, Indian policy makers realized that an offer of joint naval exercises with the ASEAN states would allay their fears. The subsequent joint naval exercises with Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia were 'damage control exercises'.

It was only in 1991, when the Rao government came to power, that the Indian economy was opened up. Since then, bilateral economic ties have improved due to India's desire to be a part of the security and economic scenario unfolding in the Asia-Pacific region. ASEAN is a member of Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and founder of ARF, and its influence is growing within these bodies. 'Consequently there is a recognition that a closer understanding with ASEAN would make it possible for India to become an integral part of the dynamic Asia-Pacific region in the long run. Thus India's policy towards ASEAN is motivated by this larger quest. As before, derived interests still guide this policy,' concludes Sridharan.

Baladas Ghoshal's edited *India and Southeast Asia: Challenges and Opportunities* is a collection of papers submitted at a seminar organized by the India International Centre in February 1994. This slim volume reflects the views of some of the leading experts on India's policy towards Southeast Asia. All six papers lament missed opportunities in forging a close relationship with the Southeast Asian states during the Cold War period. They stress that regional economic cooperation is an important parameter of national security and assume a role based not on the often hollow rhetoric of politicians, but a real urgent need to unite in what is going to be an increasingly competitive world of economic blocs.

Karki Hussain's paper on 'China, India and Southeast Asia after the Cold War' is interesting and thought provoking. India's policy towards Southeast Asia is heavily influenced by the 'China factor' since China has emerged as an influential player by improving its relations with all the ASEAN countries. And though it might not be openly expressed, the ASEAN ten would perhaps like India to be a balancing factor to this Chi-

nese influence. Charan Wadhwa examines the economic partnership between India and Southeast Asia. He too highlights the new opportunities that have emerged in the region which would be mutually beneficial.

What shape India's economic partnership with ASEAN will take post the financial crisis in Southeast Asia is difficult to predict, as both strategic and political dimensions have changed. Since these papers were written in 1994, some of the analyses are outdated and repetitive. The constant factor has been economic relations at the bilateral level, which have not been easy to forge as India has to contend with other dialogue partners. The question is whether India will be able to prove its relevance to the Southeast Asian states if its policy makers follow Ghoshal's prescription of 'demonstrating its strength either in military or in economic terms. Till now India's leverage in the region is extremely limited, since India is neither feared militarily nor respected for its economic achievement.'

Clearly, such hurriedly compiled books are no substitute for a seriously researched effort like that of Sridharan's. Much has happened in Southeast Asia and India since Sridharan wrote her book in 1995. Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar (CLM) and Vietnam have become ASEAN members, there was the East Asian crisis of 1997, East Timor broke away from Indonesia in late 1999 and democracy has been restored in Indonesia. The nuclear explosions by India and Pakistan too have changed the security scenario in the region.

The paucity of literature is perhaps due to what V. Suryanarayan points out in his contribution to the Ghoshal edition. He writes, 'It is a sad commentary that even after 46 years of independence, we do not have a research institution comparable to the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore, Cornell University in the United States and Monash University in Australia.' In this context, one would like to mention a recent book, *The Future of the ARF* edited by Khoo How San. The book provides a platform for different points of view emanating from member countries other than ASEAN, and offers an evaluation of ARF and its future prospects. The ASEAN states have signalled the importance they give to India by accepting it as a member of the ARF. Kanti Bajpai's paper gives the Indian perspective viewing 'the ARF membership as an important part of its new diplomacy and particularly as a key component of its "Look-East policy".' If this book leads to a debate, it would have more than served its purpose.

**Man Mohini Kaul**

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#### ERRATA

In the Vasant Saberwal book *Pastoral Politics: Shepherds, Bureaucrats and Conservation* reviewed by Jagdish Krishnaswamy ('Seminar' 486, February 2000) the 11th line in the 4th paragraph, p. 81 should read, '... in 1864, is particularly important.' The error is regretted.

# In memoriam

## M.N. Srinivas, 1916-1999

THE death of Professor M.N. Srinivas on the 30th of November was not only a great loss to the social sciences in India, but also a personal loss to his students and many admirers. I had the privilege of knowing him from 1964 when I joined the Department of Sociology as a Master's student and was later accepted as a Ph.D. student under his supervision. Though in some ways I had known him for almost all my adult life, there remained a tremendous reserve between us. He was always generous in his praise, commented on everything I wrote, and conveyed the idea that he expected me to think much harder on many of the issues we discussed.

Srinivas' contribution to the disciplines of sociology and social anthropology and to public life in India was unique. He received many honours from Bombay University, the Royal Anthropological Institute, Government of France, the Padma Shree from the President of India, and was honorary foreign member of the two most prestigious Academies – the British Academy and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Without recounting all the directions that his research took, I believe that it was his capacity to break out of the strong mould in which area studies had been cast after the end of the Second World War on the one hand, and to experiment with the disciplinary grounding of social anthropology and sociology on the other, which marked his originality. Although he had already written a book on family and marriage in Mysore and completed his Ph.D. at Bombay University before he went to Oxford in the late forties, his training there was to play a significant role in the development of his ideas.

The generation of social scientists which came into academic adulthood, so to say, at the time of Independence, had to forge the idea of social sciences under the sign of the nation. It is these contradictory impulses – training into a discipline which had been part of the colonial enterprise (at least in the United Kingdom and France), yet participating in its establishment in a newly freed nation – that I believe shaped Srinivas' major innovations in the discipline.

It may be important to point out that it was the conjuncture between Sanskrit scholarship and the strategic concerns of World War II which shaped South Asian area studies in the U.S. Already in the colonial

period, the Pandits were accepted as important interlocutors of Hindu laws and customs to the colonial administrators. The colonial assumptions about an unchanging Indian society led to the curious assemblage of Sanskrit studies with contemporary issues in most South Asian departments in the U.S. and elsewhere. It was strongly believed that an Indian sociology must lie at the conjunction of Indology and sociology.

Srinivas' suspicion of this view was articulated in his distinction between what he called the 'book view' and the 'field view' of Indian society. It is interesting to observe that he discovered the importance of Sanskrit, not because of assumptions about an unchanging India and through his studies of texts, but because of the possibility that sanskritization offered for upward mobility in the lives of people. He rejected the notion of Brahmanization because for him sanskritization was mediated in the lives of the peasant castes through local or regional models of dominant castes. If one recalls that immediately after Independence, scholars of Sanskrit such as V. Raghavan were trying to cast Sanskrit in the role of a national language which could promote emotional integrity through education and state ceremonial, we find that Srinivas' concept was indeed extremely innovative for it dissociated Brahmanism with the spread and status of Sanskrit which could embody other values.

In my own development as a sociologist, he played a major role by suggesting that we need to look at texts in a completely new light. Thus I found that Sanskrit was by no means confined to the high texts of culture but was also the language in which local aspirations of castes, such as the wrestler castes, were expressed in the 12th and 13th centuries. It is now known that the relation between vernacularization and sanskritization was a complicated one and the first millennium was a period of radical reconceptualizations in the ideology of language. I believe that Srinivas' ideas about what relation could be forged between Indology and sociology were subtle and we have yet to fully appreciate the intellectual milieu in which his notions of 'book' and 'field' were articulated.

Srinivas' views on the importance of caste in the electoral processes in India are well known. While some have interpreted this to attest to the enduring structural principles of Indian society, for Srinivas this

was a sign of the dynamic changes that were taking place as democracy spread and electoral politics became a resource in the local worlds of village society. By inclination he was not given to utopian constructions – his ideas about justice, equality and eradication of poverty were rooted in his experiences on the ground. His integrity in the face of demands that his sociology should take into account the new and radical aspirations was one of the most moving aspects of his writing.

I remember a seminar in the seventies, when a student asked him why he had not written at greater length about the experience of untouchability in Rampura, the village he had studied. His remark was candid. As a guest of the headman who knew that he was a Brahmin, he had not been allowed to mix freely with members of these castes. His experience was limited – hence he could not speak on their behalf. Their experiences were much better represented, he felt, in the literature produced by them. For sociology to integrate these questions in its conceptual fields was not something, he said, that could be done by waving a magical wand but instead, had to be patiently worked at. This is why he was passionately interested in expanding the base of the subject so that new kinds of experiences and voices could be brought centrally into its fold. He worked hard to establish a North Eastern Hill Areas Programme in the Department of Sociology at the University of Delhi in the early seventies so that new kinds of students could be trained to do research and the discipline renewed.

As part of his methodological practice, Srinivas strongly advocated fieldwork but his concept of fieldwork was tied to the notion of locally bounded sites. Thus some of his best papers, such as the paper on dominant caste and one on a joint family dispute, came from his participation in village life. Yet, Srinivas did not write only on the village. He wrote several papers on the themes of national integration, issues of gender, new technologies, and I have often wondered why he did not theorize on the methodological implications of writing on these issues which went beyond the village. The only inclination I had of how aware he was of breaking from the classical traditions of fieldwork was when he told me jokingly that he had decided to dedicate his book on *Social Change in Modern India* to Evans Pritchard because it represented a style of doing sociology that was completely the opposite of Evans Pritchard's!

Srinivas had great literary skills. These are evident not only in his book on Rampura which he recon-

structed from memory (*A Remembered Village*), but also in the many autobiographical pieces he wrote. These essays bring out his relationship with the major anthropologists with whom he interacted, his recollections of how he constructed the discipline not only as a scholar but also as one engaged in pedagogic practices and in building the institutional foundations of these subjects. Autobiography is not the favoured mode of doing anthropology or philosophy any more – the region of the self which he explored was that of the impersonal – hence his writing was quite different from the narcissistic renderings of the self one often finds passing as autobiography.

As a teacher, Srinivas was never intrusive. He let you discover your own passions. He had the wonderful quality of patience. Yet he seemed to instinctively know when you had touched rock bottom and was there to help pull you out of your despair. I remember most the days when I would hang around near the Delhi School gate as the time for him to go back home neared, hoping that I may be allowed to walk with him. We had stimulating conversations on books, music, and political events. Reading the 19th century ethnologies was his passion. And though in the classroom he completely supported Radcliffe Brown's critique of 'conjectural history', he gave me many such books to read. I also shared his passion for detective novels which made for a nice relationship those days. In looking back, I think he may even have looked forward to those conversations.

Recently I had the opportunity to read a brilliant essay on film by his elder daughter, Lakshmi Srinivas. I recognized some traces of Srinivas' style in her. As his most devoted disciple, I know that one inherited his concerns and his style not by replicating what he did but by finding what was at stake for oneself. Lakshmi's paper made me feel that he must have communicated this to his two daughters, for here was no blind imitation or any claim over him by birthright as it were, but simply a testimony to a man who never imposed his brilliance on the younger generation. It accounts for the mixed feelings of joy at having known him and regret that I did not know him better. I hope he knew that his work and his life were an inspiration to those who knew him personally and many who encountered him only through his writing. His contributions to the making of sociology and social anthropology in India were unique. One hopes that his legacy will grow in the work of the younger generation he nourished and delighted in.

**Veena Das**

# The President speaks

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ON the eve of the golden jubilee of our Republic I have the privilege to extend to all Indians living in India or abroad, my heartiest greetings and felicitations. I also send my greetings to the brave personnel of our armed forces who stand guard to defend the unity and territorial integrity of the nation. And I pay my homage to the memory of those who laid down their lives in the defence of the Republic from external aggression and intermittent terrorist attacks across the border.

On this solemn occasion our thoughts go back to the Father of the Nation who lived and died for the freedom and unity of our nation, and to the countless men and women who followed him into the arena and faced immense hardships and sufferings in the heroic struggle for Independence. Our thoughts also go back to the founding fathers of our Constitution whose far-sighted vision and arduous labours gave us a Constitution which enshrined the traditional concepts of liberty, equality and fraternity adding to them the concept of justice – social, economic and political – and declaring our nation a sovereign democratic Republic.

The word 'Republic' is no ordinary word. It is a commitment to the effect that, in our state, supreme power is exercised not by some remote monarch but by the people. It is an affirmation that the wielder of power in India – the *adhinayaka* – is the great aggregation of our people as a whole, whom Rabindranath Tagore has immortalized as the *jana-gana*. Let us, on this anniversary, hail that proclamation and commitment. Let us celebrate the exceptional status we enjoy, the status of being the world's largest democracy. Given the chequered career of democracies elsewhere, we can be grateful to be citizens of this Republic; where an individual, be he ever so high, the Constitution and the laws made by the people remain higher than him; and where the Executive remains accountable to the Parliament.

Thanks to our early and visionary support to science and technology we have made advances in that field as would excite human imagination anywhere; thanks to our *kisans* and *mazdoors* and entrepreneurs the wheels of our agriculture, commerce and industry turn steadily with the world; and thanks, above

all, to the striving of our agricultural communities, our granaries remain full. From the 1970s, when our GDP grew at only around 3.5% per annum, economic growth rate has accelerated to around 6.5%. It is not generally realised that in the 1990s, India has become one of the 10 fastest growing economies in the world. We can be justly proud of the abundance of our entrepreneurial ability, the high levels of domestic private savings, and also of the high level of managerial and technical skills. All these have enabled our economic reforms to have a solid and a stable base for further and more rapid growth. This is a day when we take pride in our achievements, but it must surely also be a day of honest self-analysis and self-questioning about where we, as a people and a society, are headed?

Fifty years into our life in the Republic we find that justice – social, economic and political – remains an unrealized dream for millions of our fellow citizens. The benefits of our economic growth are yet to reach them. We have one of the world's largest reservoirs of technical personnel, but also the world's largest number of illiterates; the world's largest middle class, but also the largest number of people below the poverty line, and the largest number of children suffering from malnutrition. Our giant factories rise from out of squalor; our satellites shoot up from the midst of the hovels of the poor. Not surprisingly, there is sullen resentment among the masses against their condition erupting often in violent forms in several parts of the country.

Tragically, the growth in our economy has not been uniform. It has been accompanied by great regional and social inequalities. Many a social upheaval can be traced to the neglect of the lowest tier of society, whose discontent moves towards the path of violence. Dalits and tribals are the worst affected by all this. In parts of rural India forms of sadism seem to be earmarked for dalit women. From the time of Draupadi our womenfolk have been subjected to public disrobing and humiliation as a means of vendetta – individual, social or political. For Dalit women it has become a common experience in rural areas, but what is astounding is that it has been extended as one of the methods of ragging in our elite colleges and universities.

To open a newspaper or to hear the news over television now requires nerves of steel. Violence in society has bared a hundred fangs as the advertisement-

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<sup>1</sup>President K.R. Narayanan's address to the nation on the eve of Republic Day, 25 January 2000.

driven consumerism is unleashing frustrations and tensions in our society. The unabashed, vulgar indulgence in conspicuous consumption by the *nouveauriche* has left the underclass seething in frustration. One half of our society guzzles aerated beverages while the other has to make do with palmfuls of muddied water. Our three-way fast lane of liberalization, privatisation and globalisation must provide safe pedestrian crossings for the unempowered India also, so that it too can move towards 'equality of status and opportunity'. 'Beware of the fury of the patient man,' says the old adage. One could say, 'Beware of the fury of the patient and long-suffering people.'

We cannot and ought not halt movement in the trajectories of our modern progress. Factories will and must rise, satellites must and will soar to the heavens, and dams over rivers will rise to prevent floods, generate electricity and irrigate dry lands for cultivation. But that should not cause ecological and environmental devastation and the uprooting of human settlements, especially of tribals and the poor. Ways and methods can be found for countering the harmful impact of modern technology on the lives of the common people. I believe that the answer to the ill-effects of science and technology is not to turn our back on technology, but to have more science and technology that is directed to human needs and for the betterment of the human condition.

While government must be held responsible for environmental and human consequences of mega projects, the responsibility for environmental protection, however, cannot lie with government alone. It must also be borne by civil society. There is need to improve the tone of our social and economic life through improved work ethic and environmental behaviour. Far too many of us lack the professional pride to see a task well performed, a responsibility well borne. Accountability in the delivery of public services is shockingly low. One reason why our infrastructure remains weak is that the quality of civil work executed is poor – compromised by sub-standard materials, corrupt practices and sloppy supervision.

We ignore the social dimension of our actions and practices. The late Dr. Adiseshiah, one of our prominent economists and academicians, wrote about his mother that she was a high born lady who kept her house spotlessly clean. Every morning she used to sweep and clean the household herself and then dump the rubbish in the neighbour's garden. Self-regarding purity and righteousness ignoring others has been the bane of our culture. It has created a gulf in our society

between people even with regard to the basic needs and fundamental rights.

For example, water is a basic need and a fundamental right of the people. Yet today millions of our people are struggling to get adequate clean drinking water. Less than 150 years ago, there were hardly any government sponsored water supply schemes in India. But we have a long standing strong tradition of water management, which was built on the technology of rainwater harvesting. Not only does that tradition still survive in the Northeast and the Himalayan regions like Ladakh, but remnants of that tradition can be found in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Rajasthan and other states. There is no reason why we cannot revive this tradition of our forefathers. Water is required for not only drinking, but for agriculture and animal husbandry. Good water management can help to increase water supply and regenerate rural ecology and rural economy. Government's efforts to increase water supply can be supplemented by a people's movement to capture and conserve rain water. We have to organize a people's movement for stopping the pollution of our rivers and groundwater reserves. This would be a great contribution to our economy as well as to public health.

I have referred earlier to the question of illiteracy in our country. It is today an accepted fact that literacy and education lies at the root of human as well as economic development. Why is it that as a nation we do not feel the desperate urgency of making our people literate? I hope that vested interests have not been fearful of awakening the masses through education. On the contrary we should have faith in the people. We should organize a mass movement for literacy. Cannot we involve the millions of our students, teachers and civil servants to spread literacy among the masses, at least on a part time basis? Through such a movement not only literacy but national and social causes like population control and environmental consciousness could be spread among the people, not to speak of awareness of and opposition to the many ills that plague our society.

Fortunately civic action in India has multiplied during recent years. Civil society should be further encouraged to grow and address social, cultural and environmental challenges confronting the nation. We need a comprehensive policy to promote the growth of civil society interacting with various branches and levels of government. Even in a developed and affluent society like the U.S.A. there are around six million such organizations disposing off 8% of the country's

GDP in their activities. Not only the government but the private sector also has an important role to play in a comprehensive civic action plan. We have a model for us in the constructive programme chalked out and implemented during the independence movement by Mahatma Gandhi.

I said a little earlier that this is an occasion for honest self-analysis. I think it would not be wrong to say that as a society we are becoming increasingly insensitive and callous. Gandhiji had tried to popularize the Gujarati song which describes the 'true Vaishnava' as one who knows the other person's pain. He may not find too many of that description in India today. Be it the way cars and buses are driven in our city roads, the way garbage and, particularly, middle class plastic garbage, is strewn around, the way public servants treat the public, or the public handles public utilities, the manner in which we squander or pollute precious reserves like water, the way owners of vehicles allow toxic gases to be spewed into the air that we breathe, the way we allow children to be exploited, the disabled to be passed by, speaks of a stony-hearted society, not a compassionate one that produced the Buddha, Mahavira, Nanak, Kabir and Gandhi.

And then there is our greatest national drawback: the status of our women, and our greatest national shame, the condition of the Dalits, the erstwhile untouchables. Fifty years after our Constitution, the plain truth is that the female half of the Indian population continues to be regarded as it was in the 18th and 19th centuries. It is more than 170 years since Raja Rammohan Roy caused sati to be abolished. But the infamous practice still manages to raise its head and, what is worse, even gets explained away as 'suicide' or as saintly sacrifice!

What one finds disconcerting is even the absence of political rhetoric on these social ills. Commenting on the male-female disparity in India, Gandhiji wrote in 1931: 'You cannot have one set of weights and measures for the one and a different one for the other. Yet we have never heard of a husband mounting the funeral pyre of his deceased wife.' Unless the status of women in Indian society changes, the 'Equality' spoken of in our Preamble will remain hollow. It is against this attitude of society and the habit of discrimination prevalent in society that the demand for constitutional reservation for women in the legislatures and Parliament has become a compelling necessity.

We have to ponder over the condition of not only women in our society, but of the Dalits, the tribals and other weaker sections. Untouchability has been abol-

ished by law but shades of it remain in the ingrained attitudes nurtured by the caste system. Though the constitutional provision of reservation in educational institutions and public services flow from our Constitution, these provisions remain unfulfilled through bureaucratic and administrative deformation or by narrow interpretations of these special provisions. It seems, in the social realm, some kind of a counter revolution is taking place in India. It is forgotten that these benefits have been provided not in the way of charity, but as human rights and as social justice to a section of society who constitute a big chunk of our population, and who actually contribute to our agriculture, industry and services as landless labourers, factory and municipal workers. There are signs that our privileged classes are getting tired of the affirmative action provided by Constitutional provisions. On this golden jubilee I would like to say that let us not get tired of what we have provided for our weaker sections, for otherwise, as Dr. Ambedkar pointed out, the edifice of our democracy would be like a palace built on a dung heap.

If on an occasion like this golden jubilee of our Republic we ponder some of these issues, it would be the better for us. While there is need to be honest with ourselves, I must emphasize, we must act, not despair. In moments of crisis we rise gloriously to the occasion as few societies do. The war in Kargil showed it; the cyclone in Orissa did so too. And, even more recently, the stoic fortitude with which the nearly 170 passengers and crew aboard the hijacked plane showed how we are capable of the highest endurance, calm, fortitude and human care. But we do not have to reserve our best qualities for national or natural calamities; they should manifest themselves in our daily life. The Biblical exhortation, 'Do not do unto others what thou wouldst not others do unto thyself' was anticipated by Vyasa in his words: *Aatmanaha pratikulaani pareshaam na samaacharet.*

The world watches us with a combination of admiration and concern: admiration at what we have achieved despite great odds, and concern over the fact that, even with great investments of money and energy, we remain far from our goal. Indians do well, they say; India does not. We must examine the import of that observation and try to rectify the situation. Of course the rest of the world, too, is faced by crises. The end of the Cold War has not ended all conflicts, it has only changed its character. Even as we want equality amongst ourselves, so do we want equality among the nations of the world. This does not and cannot mean

that all countries have the same of everything. But it does mean that no nation or continent can seek overlordship over others claiming political, economic, technological or strategic superiority.

We are privileged, as Indians, to have played a leading role in the decolonizing of the mighty continents of Asia and Africa. We are the initiators of the concept of non-alignment in a world when it was bitterly divided by the Cold War, and whether the great powers now recognize or not the role of non-alignment in ending the Cold War, the fact of its contribution remains for all to see. And we are also co-authors with the People's Republic of China of the five principles of peaceful coexistence which provide the world a code of conduct in international relations. The principles like the respect for the territorial integrity and independence of nations, non-interference in their internal matters and mutual benefit and equality are precious concepts which cannot become redundant in a world of globalisation. We are privileged also to be playing a role to see that in the new millennium all the nations of the world, enjoy the same political status and have a level playing field, economically and technologically. This will be our endeavour in all the world bodies of which we are proud to be members or associated with – the United Nations, the Commonwealth, the Non-Aligned Movement and the new formations such as the WTO and important regional groupings like ASEAN, SAARC, the Indian Ocean Rim Association.

We are proud to belong to South Asia and to the Asian continent. We celebrate this year the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations with China. We wish that country and its people every happiness. We want to live in peace with Pakistan. We want the relations to conform to the best traditions of good neighbourliness, eschewing terrorist interventions and the propaganda of hatred. In the spirit in which Jawaharlal Nehru declared in the Constituent Assembly, I take this opportunity to send greetings to all our immediate neighbours, to the sister continent of Africa, the Commonwealth of Nations, the European Union, the United States of America and Latin America, to Japan, and to the Arab nations and the countries of the Pacific and Central Asia with whom we have traditional ties of friendship. To Russia with which our political, economic, cultural and strategic relations remain strong, we reiterate our fraternal goodwill.

I once again extend my greetings to all fellow citizens. May all of us cross the golden milestone and march along the vision of the founding fathers of our Republic.

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IT gives me great pleasure to be here amidst you at this function to mark the golden jubilee celebrations of the birth of the Indian Republic and the commencement of our Constitution. The establishment of the democratic Republic of India was obviously a significant and glorious event for India, for the freedom and welfare of the hundreds of millions of its people. But it was also a world event of far reaching significance. People talk about the triumph of democracy in the world against other forms of government. For that triumphant outcome, democracy in India has had a meaningful part to play not in the way of taking part in the ideological Cold War, but in the sense of setting an overpowering example to the world.

What Sir Anthony Eden, the Prime Minister of Britain, said at the time of the emergence of Indian Republic is relevant in this context. He said, 'Of all the experiments in government, which have been attempted since the beginning of time, I believe that the Indian venture into parliamentary government is the most exciting. A vast subcontinent is attempting to apply to its tens and thousands of millions a system of free democracy... It is a brave thing to try to do so. The Indian venture is not a pale imitation of our practice at home, but a magnified and multiplied reproduction on a scale we have never dreamt of. If it succeeds, its influence on Asia is incalculable for good. Whatever the outcome we must honour those who attempt it.'

Even more meaningful was the opinion expressed by an American Constitutional authority, Granville Austin, who wrote that what the Indian Constituent Assembly began was 'perhaps the greatest political venture since that originated in Philadelphia in 1787.'

Mahatma Gandhi had visualized the new Constitution of India in terms of universal values applied to the specific and special conditions of India. As early as 1931 he had written, 'I shall strive for a Constitution which will release India from all thralldom and patronage. I shall work for an India in which the poorest shall feel that it is their country in whose making they have an effective voice; an India in which there is no high class or low class of people, an India in which all communities shall live in perfect harmony. There can be no room in such an India for the curse of untouchability. We shall be at peace with the rest of the world, neither exploiting nor exploited. All interests not in conflict with the interests of the dumb millions

\*\* Address to the nation on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Republic of India from the Central Hall of Parliament, 27 January 2000



will be scrupulously respected whether foreign or indigenous. Personally, I hate the distinction between foreign and indigenous. This is the India of my dreams for which I shall struggle.'

At the core of our Constitution lies the essence of this Gandhian dream in the form of social justice and social democracy. Granville Austin has described the Indian Constitution as 'first and foremost a social document.' He further explained that, 'The majority of India's constitutional provisions are either directly arrived at furthering the aim of social revolution or attempt to foster this revolution by establishing conditions necessary for its achievement.' The very same point was elaborated in eloquent terms by Dr. Ambedkar and Pandit Nehru. What makes our Constitution relevant to the conditions and the problems of India and the developing world is, in fact, the socio-economic soul of it. Its uniqueness is that it has combined this harmoniously with the liberal rights and freedoms as conceived by the western democracies.

It is after deep thought and considerable debate that the founding fathers adopted the philosophy and the form of government for India. Speaking on the draft of the Constitution, Dr. Ambedkar claimed that, 'It is workable, it is flexible and it is strong enough to hold the country together both in peace time and in war time. Indeed, if I may say so, if things go wrong under the new Constitution, the reason will not be that we had a bad Constitution. What we will have to say is that Man is vile.' Today when there is so much talk about revising the Constitution or even writing a new Constitution, we have to consider whether it is the Constitution that has failed us or whether it is we who have failed the Constitution. Dr. Rajendra Prasad, as President of the Constituent Assembly, had pointed out: 'If the people who are elected are capable men of character and integrity, they should be able to make the best of a defective constitution. If they are lacking in these, the Constitution cannot help the country.' I believe these are wise words which we should pay heed to.

The form of government, the parliamentary democratic form, was chosen by the founding fathers after deep thought and debate. In the Constituent Assembly, Dr. Ambedkar explained that the Drafting Committee in choosing the parliamentary system for India, preferred more responsibility to more stability, a system under which the government will be on the anvil every day. He said that accountability was still difficult to obtain from day-to-day. Thus the parliamentary system was a deliberate and well thought out choice of the Constituent Assembly. It was not chosen

in imitation of the British system or because of the familiarity with it that India had acquired during the colonial period.

Gandhiji while acknowledging our debt to Britain with regard to parliamentary government had observed that the roots of it were present in India in the age-old system of the village panchayats. Dr. Ambedkar explained in the Constituent Assembly that the Buddhist *sanghas* were parliamentary type of institutions and that in their functioning modern parliamentary devices like resolutions, divisions, whips, etc. were used. These elements in our heritage made it possible and easy for India to adopt the parliamentary system of democracy. Besides, as Dr. Ambedkar told the Constituent Assembly, the Drafting Committee chose this system because they preferred more responsibility to stability which could slip into authoritarian exercise of power.

Another factor to be borne in mind is the immensity of India, the perplexing variety and diversity of the country, the very size of its population and the complexity of its social and developmental problems. In such a predicament described by one writer, as one of 'a million mutinies' there must be in the body politic a vent for discontents and frustrations to express themselves in order to forestall and prevent major explosions in society. The parliamentary system provides this vent more than a system which prefers stability to responsibility and accountability. Our recent experience of instability in government is perhaps not sufficient reason to discard the parliamentary system in favour of the presidential or any other system.

In my opinion we should avoid too much rigidity in our system of government as in a very rigid system there is the danger of major explosions in society taking place. The possibility and the facility of a change in government is itself a factor in the stability of the political system in the long term because then the people will be more inclined to tolerate a political situation they do not approve of or find difficult to cope with for long. At any rate as Dr. Rajendra Prasad said, the shortcomings in the people entrusted with running the system cannot be obviated by constitutional changes or provisions.

Amendments to the Constitution are a different matter. The founding fathers deliberately made the amendment process of the Constitution easy so that shortcomings or lacunae in the Constitution could be rectified by the Parliament without too much difficulty. There are other changes that can be brought about like changes in the electoral law or the functioning of the

political parties. Whatever we may do, and we have a right to bring about necessary changes in the political and economic system, we should ensure that the basic philosophy behind the Constitution and fundamental socio-economic soul of the Constitution remain sacrosanct. We should not throw out the baby with the bath water and like the tragic character Othello in Shakespeare have to lament later, 'Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away — richer than all his tribe.'

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I DEEM it an honour and a privilege to be present at the inauguration of the golden jubilee of the Supreme Court of India. The Supreme Court occupies a vital position in our constitutional scheme. The founding fathers have placed great expectations in the court and the people have reposed their faith in it as the apex court of our independent judiciary.

On 28 January 1950, at the inauguration of the first sitting of the Supreme Court, Chief Justice Kania said that the court will stand firm and aloof from party politics and political theories, that it is not concerned with changes in government, that it stands to administer laws for the time being in force, and that it has goodwill and sympathy for all, but is allied to no one. He added that it is the duty of the court to interpret the Constitution with an enlightened liberality.

During the last 50 years the court has fulfilled this duty with admirable impartiality which has elicited praise from India and abroad. It has interpreted the Constitution not only with liberality but by also creatively responding to the challenges of the times in what has been called judicial activism. This activism consisted not of creating new law but in bringing out explicitly what has been implicit in the Constitution. The enlargement of the fundamental rights and the elevation of some of the directive principles of the Constitution have been done in this spirit. In this manner the right to work, the right to education and the right to health and health care have been raised to the level of fundamental rights.

Even more significantly, persons arbitrarily deprived of their liberty and victims of custodial death have no longer to remain content with only judicial declaration of invalidity, but now receive monetary compensations for the violations of human rights inflicted on them. Commenting on this progressive and humanitarian role of the judiciary in India, the British legal luminary, Lord Woolf has said: 'The depth of feeling

in India for the traditions of the common law has been astonishing and the richness of its development year by year has been helped by the excellent judges of the Indian Supreme Court.' It is not an exaggeration to say that the degree of respect and public confidence enjoyed by the Supreme Court is not matched by many other institutions in the country.

The judiciary in India has become the last refuge for the people and the future of the country will depend upon the fulfilment of the high expectations reposed by the people in it. The Chief Justice, Dr. A.S. Anand has recently said that without access to unpolluted, expeditious and inexpensive justice, the people, instead of taking recourse to law may be tempted to take the law into their own hands. I was disturbed to read the other day in a newspaper editorial that in some parts of the North East of the country the insurgents have put forward as ground for their armed activities the inordinate delay by the judiciary in disposing off cases before the courts.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India, of the time has recounted in his memoirs a story when he was a lawyer. He was appearing in a court in Patna on behalf of a client. He told the judge, 'My Lord, justice in this case requires that ...' whereupon the judge promptly intervened and said, 'Judges are not here to do justice, but to decide cases according to evidence on record.' Recently one of the judges in India let a person accused of murder go free on the ground that clinching evidence was lacking, though the judge himself was convinced that the person did commit the deed he was charged with. Mysterious are the ways of justice. That is why it has been said that, 'The law court is not a cathedral but a casino where so much depends on the throw of the dice.'

Let us remember on this occasion that the success of the judiciary rests a great deal on the bar. India has a bar that scintillates with brilliance. But justice is not affordable to the people. That is why Mahatma Gandhi had lamented long time ago that the law has become the luxury of the rich and the joy of the gambler. It is heartening that under the leadership of the Chief Justice Anand, the Conference of Chief Justices of India has adopted a statement on 'values of judicial life' as a step towards self-reform of the judiciary. I hope that this statement of values by the judiciary would pave the way for an accountable judiciary for India, for dispensing quick, affordable and incorruptible justice to the people. With this thought may I congratulate the Supreme Court and the entire judiciary of India and the bar on this golden jubilee celebrations.

\*\*\* Speech on the occasion of Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Supreme Court of India, 28 January 2000.

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# Backpage

THE Indian Constitution is more than a historical compact. True, it does not have a life of its own; it does not work but has to be worked. It sets both the goals we as a people aspire towards as also the rules and procedures by which we may engage in the exercise of transformation. As legal scholar S.P. Sathe observes, 'The Constitution has become the authentic reference scale for political behaviour.' It is, in other words, akin to a new *Dharmashastra* for public life.

It is also, as constitutional historian Granville Austin repeatedly stresses in his massive tome, *Working a Democratic Constitution*, a seamless web, providing a structure to reconcile and work the triple objectives of 'unity-integrity, democracy and social revolution.' It has also been subjected to close to 80 amendments and at least five major reviews. This is why caution and temperance rather than contingent needs, often expedient and populist, should mark the demands for a fresh review.

It can be no one's case that compacts – goals, rules, procedures – be treated as a given. Contexts change, as do demands and aspirations. In itself thus, no objection can be taken to the call for a fresh review. And the Golden Jubilee of the Constitution is as good a time as any to engage in an exercise of assessment and introspection.

However, as constitutional experts, including the President, caution, many of the earlier amendments and reviews were subsequently discovered to be partially flawed. In some cases, as for instance with the 44th amendment, the objective was in the main to undo what was done with the fundamentally flawed and undemocratic 42nd amendment.

One is here not referring to the first amendment in 1951 which brought in the Ninth Schedule, placing specific laws (mainly those concerning land ceilings and tenurial arrangements in the countryside) beyond judicial review, but specious efforts at extending the life of Parliament, placing high political functionaries beyond scrutiny, curbing fundamental freedoms by raising imaginary scares about dangers to national unity and integrity, and bypassing due process requirements of common law by invoking the need for social revolution.

The current calls for exploring the possibility of a Presidential system, of giving the Parliament a fixed term of life, of bringing in proportional representation, reducing the number of political parties in Parliament, or introducing the German practice of a constructive

vote of no confidence – seem more designed to reduce the spectre of instability faced by the regime in power. As such, like the Emergency provisions referred to earlier, they become both suspect and divisive. One only wishes that Messrs Vajpayee and company recall their own arguments of a quarter century back before seeking to occupy the high moral ground. Similarly the main opposition, the Congress (I), as also the Left, should not operate on the premise of a short public memory when vociferously underscoring their faith in the Constitution.

The one merit of our fractious public discourse has been to force the proposed constitutional review exercise on the backfoot. There was hope that the designation of Justice Venkatachalliah as Chairman of the review committee, his clarification that the basic structure of the Constitution (including the parliamentary framework) was outside the terms of reference, and his insistence that membership should draw upon acknowledged experts, would help allay current fears. But the refusal of Fali S. Nariman, though nominated by the current regime to membership of the Rajya Sabha, to be part of a review initiated by government rather than Parliament, speaks volumes about the legitimacy, as also significance, of the exercise. As does the final composition now in place.

Maybe what one should instead focus on is giving substance to a variety of recommendations made by previous commissions, in particular the Sarkaria Commission. Why not take up the now forgotten recommendations of the Dinesh Goswami committee for political reforms, or draw upon the labours of the expert group set up by Ramakrishna Hegde? Or is it that our political class, whatever its public pronouncements and internal differences, is in unanimity about not legislating any curbs on itself as a welcome first step towards evolving a healthy norm based polity.

It is well known that the greatest strains in our system have arisen from our inability to acquire clarity about the role and limits of the legislative, executive and judicial wings. Given Keshvanand Bharati and the arithmetic needed for amendments – simple or two-thirds majority in Parliament, approval from the states, and judicial scrutiny – what the NDA needs is both internal consensus and taking the opposition along. Only reasoned discourse rather than partisan polemic can infuse meaning into what otherwise will be a fruitless engagement.

**Harsh Sethi**

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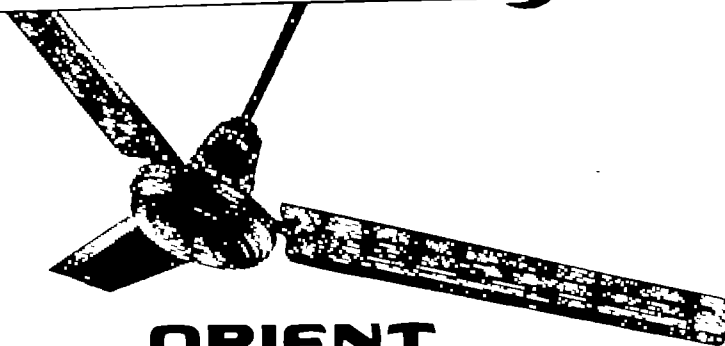


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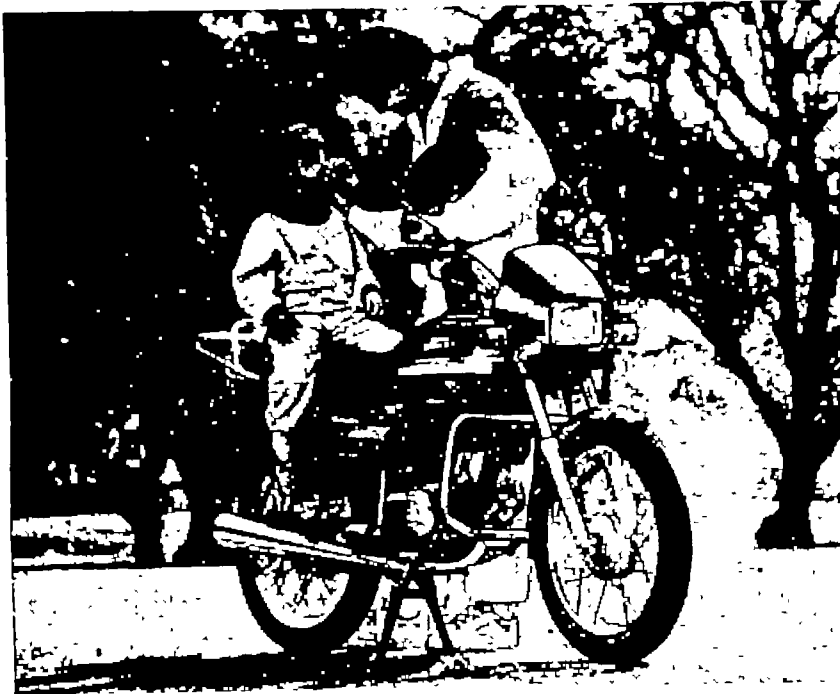
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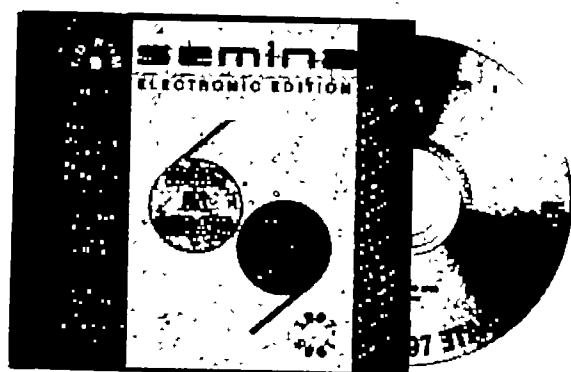
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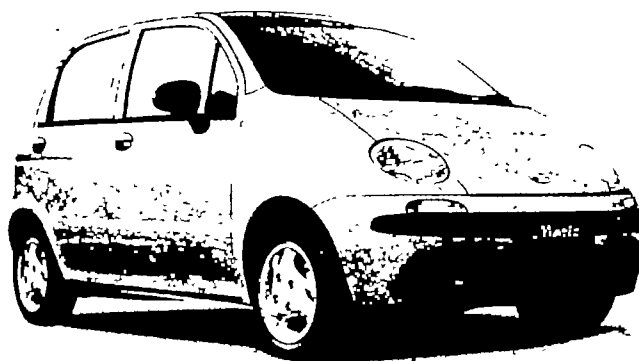
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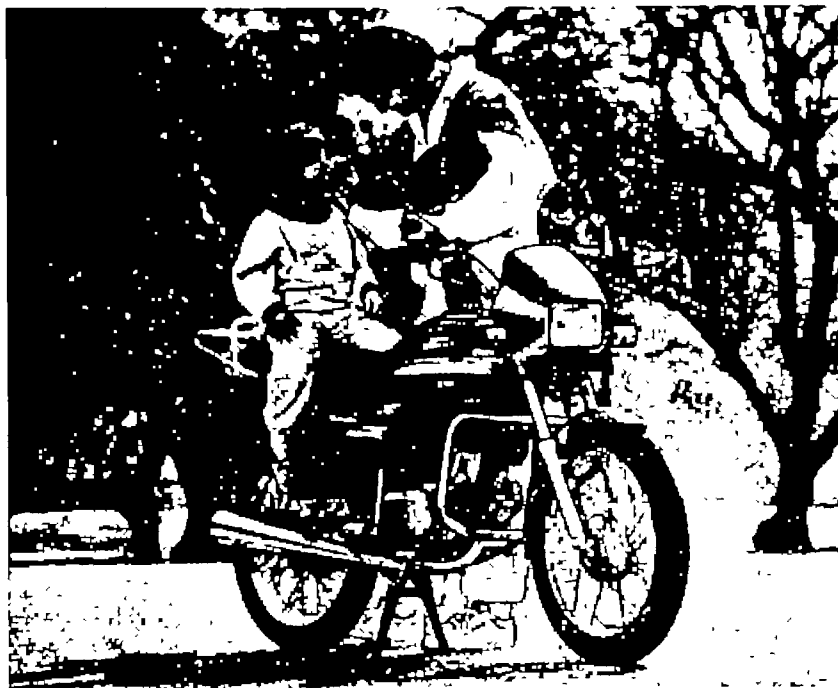


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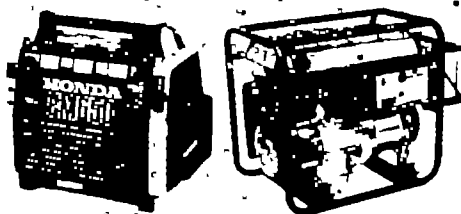
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# The problem

'An old man loved is winter with flowers' (old German proverb). \* To a society and culture that has long prided itself in its veneration of the elderly (witness the popularity of the Shravan Kumar story), the existential reality of the aged may come as a surprise. Our older citizens, on a daily basis, are reminded both of their expendability as also of the deepening coarseness society displays towards them. Be it the way they are treated within the family, the woeful inadequacy of healthcare provisions directed towards the old, and above all the increasing incidence of the violence they face – it is evident that modern Indian society is ill-prepared to meet the challenges posed by the greying of its population.

A part of this problem can be traced to material scarcities. Most societies, the poorer ones even more so, find it difficult to set aside scarce resources to take care of the elderly. Given the widespread application of the framework of triage, the elderly and infirm are invariably passed over in favour of those classified as productive and useful. But equally, the problem lies in the fetishization of youth. Modern industrial and post industrial cultures foreground the vitality and energy of the young as against the wisdom and experience of the old. And even though we have yet to approximate the western obsession with remaining young, we are clearly getting there.

It is likely that in earlier times ageing as a social problem did not preoccupy societies. Life expectancy was in any case low. Since only a few survived for long years, it was easier to either venerate them as repositories of wisdom and tradition or create social mechanisms which encouraged the aged to step away from the management of everyday concerns. The notions of

*vanaprastha* and *sanyasa* probably evolved as a response to the need of displacing the old.

With an increasing proportion of our population living for ever longer years, we are now confronted with the problem of not knowing what to do with our elderly citizens. Simultaneously, our senior citizens too are challenged by how to creatively and usefully occupy themselves, and that in a society which displays little patience for the old. The joint family, long held out as our answer to this problem, is neither as widespread as popularly believed, nor does it seem capable of accommodating the pressures created by the demands of a modern urban and industrialized lifestyle.

If honourable living within a joint, multi-generational family has become difficult, a dignified separate existence too is not easy. Be it ensuring economic and physical security or accessing basic services, including healthcare, everyday living often creates trauma for our elderly. Far worse is the expression of societal neglect and unconcern. Increasingly pushed into mining their own resources, both economic and emotional, the aged are increasingly thrown into their own age cohorts, a process that can only strengthen feelings of alienation.

Such at least is the picture presented in our mass media or through the popular soaps and films. Even the more sensitive Bollywood productions, *Saransh* or *36 Chowringhee Lane*, paint the elderly protagonists as somewhat feeble and helpless, unable to bring joy and meaning into their lives without an active association with the young. Just take an early morning walk and listen to the conversation of the old. It is either full of pride about successful children or, more frequently, about how they are treated within the household. The speech is marked by anguish and insecurity. Little wonder that so many older people are unwilling to settle



their property matters, fearful that in the absence of economic resources they may be forced to move out.

Those who live on their own, a phenomenon now fairly widespread, are obsessed with issues of physical security, not surprising given the incidence of crimes targeting the old. The difficulties they face in accessing basic services – from medical to recreational – are legion. Over-riding all these is a feeling of loneliness and worthlessness.

Unfortunately, detailed research on the aged is hard to come by. For a start, even basic demographic data is only now being subject to detailed analysis. In the absence of indepth anthropological studies on the joint family system, both regionally and for different socio-cultural groups, we continue to believe in its resilience. We need to map out how our aged live – within joint families, alone, in ashrams or old age homes, where? Why is it that institutional care for the elderly – be it day care centres or residential homes – is more widespread in the West and South rather than the North. And above all, we need to improve our understanding of the non-urban middle class world. Far too often, both our understanding and consequent policy recommendations are overly conditioned by our middle class worldview.

In particular, we need to direct our attention towards the special problems faced by old women, more so widows. Except when controversies of the kind generated by the filming of *Water* arise, as a society we remain supremely unconcerned about their fate. In urban, middle class households they are reduced to the level of unpaid help; in rural and tribal society they are left to fend for themselves.

The government has recently formulated a national policy for older persons, listing out a range of social welfare measures targetted towards the

elderly. A few states, notably Himachal Pradesh, have even experimented with legislating for the elderly, mandating them as a legal charge on their children. While the merits or otherwise of the proposed policy will continue to be debated, it remains a matter of concern that we have increasingly to rely on the state to provision for our elderly and that inter-generational relationships have to be recast in the language of legal rights and entitlements. As H.Y. Sharada Prasad, in a recent column in *Asian Age* presciently pointed out, 'It is not the government that has elderly parents, but we. It is up to us to take the initiative in protecting them.'

It is heartening that civil society has taken some steps in this direction, be it through setting up day care centres, old age residential homes, organising recreational activities for the elderly, arranging care of the indigent or terminally ill, and so on. The medical establishment too has got sensitized to the special problems faced by the elderly, both physiological and psychological. More important, the elder citizens have begun to organise themselves in forums for mutual support, as pressure groups for policy changes and so on. Outside the family, many older people have become active participants in NGOs, in helping improve civic life, in brief, carving out an active and useful role for themselves. The last in particular has been crucial in helping break the image of the elderly as dependant.

As long as we continue to perceive older persons as a problem, it will be difficult to move out of a utilitarian and instrumental focus. A civilized society must create conditions such that the aged can live lives of self-worth and dignity, more a source of joy than a burden. This issue of *Seminar* examines some of these concerns. There is no getting away from the fact that the elderly are today what we will be tomorrow.

# National policy on older persons

C P SUJAYA

SINCE the time when development planning was initiated in independent India, the state has recognised older persons as a priority target group for social welfare interventions. The Directive Principles of State Policy in our Constitution enjoin the state to provide public assistance to older persons within the limits of its economic capacity. The early social welfare interventions for this group included old age pension and shelter. These were introduced by state governments in the '50s and the '60s and now most states have some form of old age pension scheme. Additional welfare schemes were launched in the succeeding decades.

The social welfare approach was conditioned by humane principles. Older persons were perceived as the natural recipients of welfare handouts, doles and institutionalised

services. The state did not view them as a resource or as active participants in planning their own development and welfare. On the other hand, the state governments found that there were severe financial constraints in expanding these social welfare schemes to cover larger numbers of older persons.

The coverage of the population as well as the quantum of individual pension granted under the scheme remained minuscule. It became an ameliorative measure, aimed more at preventing destitution and penury rather than covering risks attendant with old age. This absence of an effective and comprehensive framework of social security assistance for the overwhelming majority of the older citizens continues to date.

The National Policy on Older Persons was announced by the gov-

ernment in 1999, declared as the International Year of Older Persons by the UN. The year 2000 has been declared as the National Year of Older Persons by the Government of India. The decision to frame a policy for older persons was first mooted in the '80s, following the World Assembly on Ageing held at Vienna in 1982. In 1987-88 an Inter Ministerial Committee was constituted by the GOI for this purpose. The process of formulating the policy gathered momentum in the two years preceding 1999. According to ministry officials, the process envisaged active involvement of voluntary organisations, research bodies, schools of social work, and so on. A number of regional consultations were held along with a national level consultation to discuss the draft policy document prepared by the ministry for getting feedback from a broad range of positions and approaches.

**T**he national policy reflects a few basic and interlinking concerns. These include the impact of demographic changes overtaking the country's population in the wake of an increase in health coverage and the adoption of the small family norm resulting in an increase in the responsibility of the working population for elderly care; the magnitude of the task of reaching even minimal social assistance to the large numbers of the elderly; the effect of the changes in the economy due to urbanisation and industrialisation, and the introduction of new technology and new life styles and values on the structure and functioning of families and their capacity to care for the elderly.

The policy highlights the plight of the vulnerable within the older person's category such as widows, women in general, the poor, rural residents, the disabled and chronically (including mentally) ill and others.

The national policy is open ended. It promises an array of state interventions – support for financial security, health care, shelter and welfare, special focus on older women, protection against abuse and exploitation and special attention to rural areas. It also recognises that the state by itself cannot achieve these objectives, except partially.

**I**ndeed, it is difficult to take these grand promises seriously, or envisage from where the funds for some of the new state interventions promised in the policy, even under such important heads as health, shelter and welfare, will be found given the precarious financial position of the government in the era of reforms, especially in the underfunded social sector.

For example, the policy commits to increase the coverage under the old pension scheme from the January 1997 level of 2.76 million to include all older persons under the poverty line. But it does not specify the number of older persons below the poverty line who are to be covered if this commitment is to be fulfilled. Nor does it speak of any probable deadline or phased deadlines by which the government plans to complete this coverage – or the magnitude of funds required to complete this gigantic task. The present pension rates paid to older persons throughout the country (Rs 30 to 250 per month) affords no income or livelihood security. It is only a token payment to ward off extreme destitution. Though the policy speaks of revising the rate at intervals so that 'inflation does not deflate its real purchasing power', no details have been given to show whether the base rate existing at present will be protected through indexing or whether a total review will be done on the basis of the need for economic sustenance.

Since the below poverty line population of older persons will continue to rise (due to falling death rates and no discernible decrease in poverty ratios), the commitment of ensuring full coverage will be a never-ending task. Even at present the population above 60 years in the country is estimated at a huge 67.2 million (1995), only a fraction of which is covered by the old age pension and other schemes meant to address destitution (such as pension for agricultural labourers, unemployment relief, and so on, some of which may be accessed by older persons). While there are no available figures showing the number of older persons who are below the poverty line, the incidence of poverty can be assumed to be higher in the older age groups than in the general population.

**T**he policy statement itself has relied on the figure of 33% of the general population and concluded that one third of the population in the 60+ age group is below the poverty line. This may be an understatement. Still, accepting this figure, the number of poor older persons comes to about 23 million. Surveys from different sources show high numbers of chronically ill and disabled persons among the elderly. They also show that the elderly continue to work long after 60 years and that their average earnings are much lower than in other age groups. The burden of providing universal coverage of old age pension to the elderly poor, even within a phased period, therefore, seems beyond the capacity of the government given its financial position and a realistic perspective.

The same is true of other sectoral interventions mentioned in the document, such as strengthening the primary health care system and public health services, providing geriatric care facilities at secondary and tertiary

ary levels, starting new specialised courses in geriatric medicine, starting mobile health services for the ailing old persons, meeting the education, training and information needs of the older persons, and so on.

The policy document, in so far as these commitments relating to state interventions are concerned, can at best be seen as a statement of intent. The addition of a financial memorandum or the formulation of a plan of action to implement the policy would have significantly improved its credibility and helped nail the policy down to the immediate tasks and sort out the medium and long term action perspectives. Though policies are not expected to spell out everything in minute detail, it is incumbent on the government to plan the implementation strategies, sequence the actions and, above all, garner its resources and match the plans and commitments with the needed funds.

**B**ut there is no mention in the document about the financial implications of carrying out the commitments made in the policy or from where these resources are going to be arranged in all the sectors. All that the policy contains is a statement that an action plan will be prepared by the government, that the policy itself will be widely disseminated and 'its features remain in constant focus'. But in the one year that has elapsed since the policy was announced, no plan of action has been formulated. The ministry, perhaps, is engaged in such an exercise at present.

Questions of financial capacity, capability and viability arise, therefore, from a plain reading of the many commitments of state action made in the policy by the government. How much can the government afford to spend on new schemes for older persons or to upgrade, improve, train,

reorient, modify existing programmes to reach the older persons? How much clout does the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment have with other important ministries to ensure that the issues relating to older persons are given more importance in all their programmes?

**T**he policy refers to the legal rights of parents without any means to be supported by their children having sufficient means. These rights are enshrined in the Cr. PC as well as in the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act 1956. The policy refers approvingly to the action taken by two state governments in introducing relevant legislation at the state level and speaks of encouraging other states to pass similar legislation so that old parents unable to maintain themselves do not face 'abandonment and acute neglect.' The provisions of Cr. PC and HAMA are seldom used by parents to go to court against the children. Most litigants under Section 125 of Cr. PC are spouses, that is, wives. The provision for maintenance of parents by children, wives by husbands, etc. under these statutes, however, is not to provide minimum income or old age security but to prevent destitution and vagrancy. It cannot, therefore, substitute for state action in providing risk cover to older persons.

Though the Himachal Pradesh Maintenance of Parents and Dependents Bill was passed by the state assembly in 1996, it still awaits Presidential assent. The bill empowers any person unable to maintain himself, who is resident in the state, to apply to the tribunal for an order directing the children, grandchildren, husband, father or mother as the case may be, to pay him a monthly allowance or any other periodic payment of a lump sum for his maintenance. The bill is aimed at providing relief not only to indigent

parents (above 60 years) but to wives, children and dependants who are in a similar situation. The inability to maintain oneself is defined as not being able to meet the expenditure on basic amenities to meet physical needs including, but not limited to, shelter, food and clothing from his total or expected income and other financial resources.

Two mechanisms have been created in the bill, namely those of 'maintenance officer' and 'approved person or organisation'. The former is invested with the duty to help applicants in any legal proceedings under the act as well as to appear before the court on their behalf. He can consult the parties concerned and bring about reconciliation; he can authorise underage applicants to ask for relief if he is satisfied that infirmity of mind or body makes it difficult for the persons to maintain themselves.

**T**he 'approved persons or organisations' are those bodies engaged in social welfare or family welfare or others as approved by the state government 'whose association with a tribunal would enable it to exercise its jurisdiction more effectively in accordance with the purpose of this Act.' These organisations are authorised to defray the expenses on maintenance of the persons who have been granted relief by the tribunal and claim reimbursement from the state.

The bill provides that lawyers shall not appear before the tribunal or represent any party. The maximum period of time to decide the application by the tribunal is six month from the date of application. The bill authorises the attachment of salary payable to any person against whom a maintenance order has been passed and who is employed by the state or central government or by a local authority or from a corporation engaged in any

trade or industry which is established by the state or central government, or by a government company.

**T**here is a real reluctance on the part of parents to go to court against children. Though the Himachal Pradesh bill has some attractive features, including involvement of social organisations in the legal process, simplification of legal procedures, flexibility regarding age limits, ease of attachment of salaries, conciliation process, among others, it remains to be seen how often the statute will be made use of by older persons as compared to the other groups eligible to ask for relief, such as children and spouses.

The concerns of older persons are cross-cutting, relating to many different departments and ministries within the government. So far the needs and requirements of older persons were subsumed under the rubric of 'welfare' or 'social welfare'. Only the very poor or the destitute were directly targeted. Now the policy statement makes a break with the past by spelling out 'the principles... the directions, the needs that will be addressed and the relative roles of government and non-government institutions' to carve out 'respective areas of operation and action in the direction of a humane age-integrated society.' The policy further states that the thrust is 'on active and productive involvement of older persons and not just their care.'

This holistic approach toward older persons is sustained in the policy by identifying priorities such as social assistance and security, health, shelter, education, freedom from abuse and exploitation, research, training and manpower, besides several others. The challenge of implementing such a multi-level and multi-dimensional mandate is enormous. It calls for coordination, leadership, effective stra-

tegizing, networking, lobbying and advocacy. Above all, it calls for effective monitoring, feedback and continuous system improvement. The institutional mechanisms that are in place or are being set up to oversee the policy implementation are therefore of crucial significance.

**I**n May 1999, the ministry notified a 39-member National Council for Older Persons under the Minister for SJE to advise, provide feedback, act as a lobby and advocacy forum, and deal with complaints from individuals. This body has representation from a few central ministries such as pensions, defence, railways, communications as well as from three state governments by rotation. A representative each from the National Commission for Women and the National Human Rights Commission finds place on the NCOP. But ministries dealing with a number of important aspects of the subject of ageing and older persons, such as the following, have not been represented on the Council.

\* *health care and nutrition*: 'health care needs of older persons will be given high priority' (para 34 of the policy), 'the primary health care system will... be strengthened and oriented to meet the health care needs of older persons' (para 35 of the policy);

\* *shelter*: 'housing schemes for urban and rural lower income segments will earmark 10% of the houses/house sites for allotment to older persons... older persons will be given easy access to loans for purchase of housing and for major repairs with easy repayment schedules' (para 48 of the policy), 'a multi-purpose centre for older persons is a necessity for social interaction and... it will... be necessary to earmark sites for such centres in all housing colonies. . preferences will be given to older persons in the allot-

ment of flats on the ground floor' (para 49 of the policy);

\* *education*: 'discrimination... against older persons for availing opportunities for education, training and orientation will be removed... assistance for open universities will be sought to develop packages using distance learning techniques... educational curriculum at all stages of formal education as also non formal education programmes will incorporate material to strengthen intergenerational bonds and mutually supporting relationships' (para 56);

\* *law*: 'the introduction of special provisions in IPC to protect older persons from domestic violence will be considered and machinery provided to attend to all such cases promptly... Tenancy legislation will be reviewed so that the rights of occupancy of older persons are restored speedily' (para 65 of the policy);

\* *media*: 'the policy aims to involve mass media ... on ageing issues... to provide opportunities to media personnel to have access to information apart from their own independent sources. . their participation in orientation programmes on ageing will be facilitated' (para 89 of the policy);

\* *rural areas*, where the bulk of the older persons live, (in absolute terms as well as in terms of proportion of the population) and who are poorer, less literate and expect to live less than their urban counterparts; and

\* *labour*, which deals with the problems of the unorganised workers in the country as well as with pension and social security.

**T**he bulk of NCOP's members are experienced and well-known individuals from a wide range of backgrounds, including NGOs, citizen's groups, retired person's associations, law, social welfare and security, research, and medicine. The NCOP

is said to have not met so far. A smaller working group consisting of seven members of the NCOP has been set up to transact business on its behalf, which meets more frequently and consists of representatives of voluntary organisations, experts and other luminaries. It is chaired by the secretary of the ministry.

**T**he secretariat of the National Council, Aadhar, is located in Agewell, a voluntary organisation working with elderly citizens. Besides providing assistance to the council, it is mandated to look into individual grievances of older persons, set up a voluntary network at district level throughout the country, compile data and information relating to ageing and older persons, and carry on advocacy and awareness programmes.

Launched in November 1999, Aadhar had, up to the middle of February 2000, initiated a process of setting up voluntary action groups at the district level throughout the country in consultation with the deputy commissioners/collectors and volags. It has been able to identify nearly 2300 individuals in over 120 districts to work on a voluntary basis for the cause of older persons.

Aadhar is also formulating a strategy for handling individual letters of grievance or complaints from older persons. These are received by the ministry from a variety of sources and normally dealt with cursorily in the usual bureaucratic style. It has received over 700 such letters, most of them from the Ministry of SJE, and is currently reviewing them to find solutions and identify interactions with the concerned authorities.

While the idea of locating the secretariat of the national council in a voluntary organisation is innovative, it remains to be seen how effective Aadhar will be in shaping the agenda

and deliberations of the council, and to what extent the council itself, given its unwieldy size, can foster coordination among the sectors of health, housing and shelter, law, nutrition, education, rural development, and labour, in advocating the cause of older persons and confronting prevailing negative attitudes towards them.

Ageism and discrimination against the more vulnerable groups among the older persons has to be specially countered. The policy speaks of action plans to be prepared by each ministry of the government to implement those components of the policy which concern it. It speaks of ensuring flow of benefits to the older persons from general programmes, as well as from special programmes and schemes exclusively aimed at the older persons. It enjoins each ministry to decide on targets, time schedules, responsibilities, action points and report on progress in the annual reports.

**A**ll this calls for a high order of horizontal coordination between different government agencies. The appropriate instrument to facilitate this is an inter-ministerial committee which, though envisaged as a part of the institutional set up, has yet to be set up. Such a committee should be given the task of monitoring policy implementation in as much as it relates to the ministries and the state governments. It should also look for appropriate strategies for networking within and outside the government agencies.

We now look at some crucial issues related to the policy on older persons:

1. *Social assistance for the older persons.* The policy adopts a segmented approach to the provision of income security for older persons ('policy instruments to cover different income segments will be developed'). The

policy categorises two-thirds of the population above 60 years as economically 'fragile' out of which one half is below the poverty line and the other half is above it, but belongs to the lower income group

**W**hile the expressed need to increase the coverage of old age pensions to all those below the poverty line receives top priority in the document, the policy calls for a new pension scheme to be established for self-employed and salaried persons with provision for employers to contribute. This will be overseen by a strong regulatory authority which will make investment norms and safeguard pension funds. It is not clear for which economic category or socio-economic class or classes this new pension scheme is intended.

In pursuance of the policy commitment, the ministry appointed an expert committee 'to comprehensively examine policy questions connected with old age income security.' One report dealing with improving the existing pension provisions was submitted to the government in 1999. The second report, dealing with 'a new pension provision for excluded workers who are capable of saving even modest amounts and converting this saving into an old age income security provision' was submitted to the government in mid-January this year.

Looking at the problem of social security from the vantage point of the neediest, there is no doubt that the most vulnerable categories of older persons are those who have worked or may still be working as landless agricultural workers, small and marginal farmers, artisans in the informal sector, unskilled labourers on daily, casual or contract basis, migrant labour, informal self-employed or wage workers in the urban sector, and domestic workers. These categories

of persons have little or no job security nor any form of social security.

While a few state governments have provided some succour to these groups through special pension schemes and unemployment relief, their coverage is extremely thin. The condition of these citizens is most precarious as their engagement with the labour force is intermittent and they are subject to long spells of no work. They also have to continue working long past the age of 60 or 65 years, if health permits, for sheer survival. The concept of the age of retirement does not exist for them, nor does saving in youth for old age have much meaning.

Levels of indebtedness among these groups speaks volumes about their lack of capacity to save. The loans are taken for a mix of consumption and other 'productive' needs. This strata is increasing since the opening up of the economy to market forces, the loosening of controls and the increasing stress on industry to become globally competitive has increased casualisation of labour.

It is doubtful if the new pension scheme recommended by the Project OASIS expert committee would address the particular situation and context of the older persons who belong to this most vulnerable group of citizens in the country, even assuming that the below poverty households are not included in the scheme in view of the government's policy commitment to cover them under the old age pension scheme.

It is not possible to present an in-depth critique of this proposal in the paper. It is learnt that the OASIS report is being examined by the ministry. However, some of its premises are self-explanatory. One is that 'higher government spending on old age security has often been at the cost of expenditure on other important public goods

and services and has increasingly been a serious drain on government finances.' The other is that 'the sheer number of the elderly is too large and the resources with the state are too small to make anti-poverty programmes the central plank in thinking about the elderly... that government dole is not sustainable on a significant scale.' Another observation made in the report is that 'India faces severe problems of poverty among the elderly.'

**P**overty among the older persons is a direct consequence of the lack of income and livelihood security during the productive years of the vast majority of the rural and urban workers who are outside the formal or organised employment 'sheds', which itself is the result of the failure of development planning. Second, anti-poverty programmes are primarily aimed at providing a wage or self employment, and not doles. Third, attempts at combining thrift and credit activities with anti-poverty programmes have been quite successful in recent years. To focus on poverty among older persons without its political economy will not lead us to any sustainable solution for containing the problem of old age destitution.

The pension scheme is meant for persons who at a minimum save Rs 5 per day. Research by Project OASIS has found that only if this saving is sustained throughout the working life (of 35 years presumably), will it result in escaping the poverty line in old age, provided the pension assets are invested wisely. The project assumes an extremely large number of people who can save between Rs 3 to Rs 5 per day and thus prepare themselves for old age income security. However, the report presents no data on household expenditures or levels of indebtedness to sustain this assumption.

In discussing financial security of older persons, the policy statement shows a greater involvement with issues relating to pension and social security of workers in the urban and formal sectors of employment. The need to improve the procedures of settlement of pension cases, improvement of investments and accumulations in the provident funds, more efficient disposal of gratuity and other retirement benefits, have received greater attention in the document.

The policy refers to the need for a strong regulatory authority to oversee pension schemes and pension fund management. There are references to taxation policies and the need to reflect sensitively to the financial problems of older persons in the matter of standard deduction, annual rebate for medical treatment, etc., all aimed at the income tax paying minority in the country.

**S**imilarly, references to post retirement employment, income generating activities after retirement, career guidance and counselling and training are obviously targeted at the better-off sections in the country. Summing up, the policy statement on social assistance and security for older persons has not given any meaningful recommendation for improving the later years of the largest group of income and asset poor rural and urban poor.

*2. Issues relating to older women – legal rights.* While there are a few references in the policy statement to the gender based status of marginalisation and vulnerability of older women, there is no concrete recommendation which addresses their particular circumstances on account of gender and age. Though reference is made in the policy statement to a higher incidence of widowhood, there is no mention of a need to review the

unsatisfactory status of women's property rights.

Widowhood is intolerable because women lack both social and economic support. Ageism and patriarchy combine to make older women the most vulnerable among older persons. Abuse of older persons has been mentioned in the policy but no special reference to violence against older women finds place. The introduction of special provisions in the Indian Penal Code to protect older persons from domestic violence is, however, a welcome feature, as is the commitment to create a machinery to promptly attend to all such cases.

**T**he situation of older women needs special focus in any discussion on older persons. The high proportion of widows in the 60+ group, the more favourable female: male sex ratio in the 60+ age group, the glaring differentials in literacy and wages or earnings between older men and older women, the higher morbidity of older women as compared to older men, the differential access of older persons to health care based on gender—all serve to highlight the many points of interventions which should be taken up at policy level.

Old age, as the policy document reminds us, is not a separate part of life. The policy views the life cycle as a continuum, of which post-60 life is an integral part. It does not view age 60 as the cut-off point for beginning a life of dependency. Women face discrimination on account of their gender throughout life. Patriarchy as a system of male domination appropriates women's sexuality, labour and fertility and keeps them subordinate.

This subordination takes the shape of discrimination, disregard, insult, control, exploitation, oppression and violence—within the family as well as in the workplace and in the

larger society. Added to this, in the later years, is 'ageism' defined as 'a process of systematic stereotyping and discrimination against old people because they are old... and allows younger generation to see them as different from themselves... at times ageism becomes an expedient method by which society promotes viewpoints about the aged in order to relieve itself from responsibility toward them.'

**T**hough the codification of Hindu laws in the 1950s has been hailed as a great breakthrough for women of the majority community in India, ground experience tells us that women's access to residence, property and maintenance remains fragile and more connected to marital status. The unfettered right to will away self-acquired property which was introduced in the Hindu Succession Act 1956 with much fanfare has diluted the inheritance rights of women. The continuing presence of the concept of coparcenary too has affected her rights to access inherited property. She has a right to inherit, but her right to ask for partition of property is subject to male approval and is not unfettered.

Judicial attitudes and pronouncements have led to women being considered incapable of managing property. The right of a woman to reside in her natal dwelling house is also made subject by the courts, to her being unmarried, while daughters who are divorced, deserted or widowed are often illegally excluded under patriarchal norms. Thus the situation of older women, intrinsically bound with their legal entitlements as well as their marital status, cannot be improved unless women's overall legal rights are assured. The policy statement does not refer to this aspect at all.

Without attacking the root cause of exploitation, which is women's unequal status in law, only cosmetic

changes such as an increase in widow pension or adding to the support services available, are possible. The women's movement in India has not paid sufficient attention to the predicament of older women in the country. The many movements and campaigns for legal reform by women's groups should identify the peculiar circumstances in which older women have been placed on account of their lack of legal entitlements.

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# Ageism

VINAY KUMAR SRIVASTAVA

[I] spent [my] childhood playfully,  
youthfulness sleeping;  
cried at the sight of old age.

—Lines from a Hindi film song

In England, about two-thirds of all hospital beds are occupied by those over 65. It is a huge economic burden on the community to meet the cost of retirement pensions and support vast medical social services. Besides, a great strain is placed on the younger generation to look after them.

—Park and Park (1970)<sup>1</sup>

Dyallpur in Punjab is seen as becoming 'grey'. This 'greying' being synonymous with the elderly being left behind to look after themselves while the younger members of the family tread distant lands for better opportunities. The victims are aged parents who, having spent their life in bringing up their children, are ultimately left to fend for themselves.

—*The Hindustan Times* (9 July 1999)

MY work neither involves working with senior citizens nor on old age. Like most students of social anthropology, I am interested in kinship systems. However, my focus is more on the rich (i.e., upper and upper middle class) and elite strata of Indian society as it has been grossly neglected in the discipline with its concentration upon the institutions of tribes and peasants. An empirical study of kinship systems begins with the most elemental kin group, the family, which forms the cornerstone of human society. Studies on the family begin by exploring the rules of descent, succession and inheritance of office, domestic deities and ritual apparatus, wealth

and other material appurtenances. It is in the passage from the elderly to their descendants that we look for the operation of these rules.

Kinship deals with the basic facts of life: birth and death. Populations are replaced but cultural rules and patterns of behaviour endure. The old are replaced; the new recruited and trained who, over time, get ready to be replaced. The developmentally-oriented view of life is the pith of kinship studies.

For the purposes of this brief note, we look at the elderly population, initially in the context of family, and then move to other institutions, of which the state is of tremendous importance. This is our vantage point: contextualizing old age and its bearers in various institutions.

During fieldwork in an upper and upper middle class neighbourhood in south Delhi, I spoke at length with some old people who spent most of the time at home while their sons and daughters-in-law, or daughters and sons-in-law, were away at work. From these conversations I learnt that age stratification is concomitant with ageism, a concept that implies discrimination on the basis of age categories. The maximum discrimination experienced by the aged was within the family. However, paradoxically, it is the family, a 'primary institution' in Abram Kardiner's words, which can tirelessly fight ageism.

In April 1997, at a meeting of Sandhya Jyoti, an all-India association of senior citizens, one speaker suggested holding Mr India and Ms India

1 J.E. Park and K. Park, *Park's Textbook of Preventive and Social Medicine*, Banarsidas Bhanot Publishers, Jabalpur, 1970, 13th edition 1991, p. 328.

contests for old people. The point this 'elderly citizen', as he called himself, was endeavouring to make was that the aged were not discarded people, they were 'very utilizable and useful'. Given the overarching emphasis society and its institutions place on youth, vitality and physical attractiveness, older people tend to become marginalized or 'invisible'. Many others who spoke at the meeting, felt that older people should be 'brought into the mainstream'. True, that none of the speakers were in any position to specify what that mainstream was, or which social ingredients comprised it. However, everyone intuitively knew that the need of the hour was to make older people more visible, 'drawn centripetally', so that not only were their needs and demands recognized but that they could emerge as a strong interest group. The proposed Mr and Ms India contest represented a symbolic expression of the changing attitudes towards old age.

It has to, for the 'global experiment in life extension' is underway.<sup>2</sup> Certain demographic facts are on record. The life expectancy of the ancient Romans was 22 years; an average global man today can expect to live for 65 years. The lowest lifespan today is 38 years in Sierra Leone; the highest is in Japan where a male is expected to live for 76 and a female for 83 years. Just 57 years ago, Japanese men could expect to live for only 35.4 years and women for 43.6. The average lifespan in India today exceeds 62 years, which in 1983 was around 52.

As a result of better nutrition, advances in public health, improved

sanitation and myriad medical breakthroughs, the average human longevity has nearly doubled in the last 100 years. It will further increase: it may triple, quadruple, or perhaps the very concept of lifespan may be eliminated.<sup>3</sup> Human beings may live forever, with death becoming an event of the past. Bruce Sterling, a science fiction author, in his book *Holy Fire* describes the process that transforms a 95 year old woman into a girl of 20. In a complete cellular overhauling, new genetic material is spliced onto the ends of each of her chromosomes, a technique which not only revives her youthfulness but possibly negates the concept of lifespan.<sup>4</sup>

The global increase in longevity has led to a population explosion of older people. In the United States of America, people above the age of 65, who number 35 million today, will double by 2030. So will those who are 85 plus, sometimes called the 'oldest old', numbering about 4 million today. In Japan, one in six persons is over 65, and in a dozen years that proportion will change to one in four. India's elderly population (i.e., 60 years and above), which in 1996 was 60 million, is projected to rise to 76 million by 2001 (i.e., 7.7% of the population) and 113 million by 2016 (8.9% of the population).<sup>5</sup> The global elderly population is expected to touch 612 million by 2000. Reliable information on 'centurion old' (people living for more than 100 years) is not available for all countries; however, their number too has been steadily rising.<sup>6</sup>

3. Kluger (1997: 47)

4 c.f. Kluger (1997: 52)

5. See the advertisement inserted by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, in the national dailies on the International Day for Older Persons, 1 October 1999.

6. For instance, the number of centurion Japa-

Meantime, there has been a steady decline in global birth rates. It is not only because of the 'population bomb' that couples are encouraged to have fewer children – the 'one-child' norm adopted by China has been enforced punitively. Changes in gender relations (especially the ideology of gender equality) and several culturally tolerated alternatives to traditional institutions of family and marriage (such as cohabitation, gay families, staying single) too have contributed to decreasing fertility. It is observed that many married professional women prefer to remain childless; pregnancy and child-rearing is often interpreted by them as an onerous burden that thwarts upward career and professional mobility.

Modernity is inversely related to fertility and the desire to discover self-fulfilment in one's progeny. This ideology is most fully expressed in the western world; its individualism standing in marked contrast to the centrality otherwise accorded to large scale kin bonds. An individual desires to see himself achieve whatever he sets his eyes on, rather than expect his descendants to achieve what he has not been able to in his own lifetime. Self-fulfilment, more than an indirect fulfilment through investment in children, is what characterizes the modern man.

A drop in birth rates has important repercussions for the elderly. In proportional terms, fewer young and middle-aged people will be available to care for the older population in the years to come. During my fieldwork in urban south Delhi, I came across many households that consisted of grandparents, parents and a lone grandson. It was the grandson

nese has risen from 153 in 1963 to nearly 7400 in 1996 (Kluger 1997: 46-7).

2. See S K Ramoo, 'When You're Old and Grey', *The Hindu*, 18 August 1997, Jeffrey Kluger, 'Can Science Slow the Ageing Clock?' *Time*, 20 January 1997; Rick Weiss, 'Ageing: New Answers to Old Questions', *National Geographic*, November 1997.

who was expected to look after the elderly. One may imagine the pressure such grandsons experience. Many sons and grandsons, I learnt, sacrificed opportunities for career enhancement, especially those which demanded their geographical mobility, because they had to look after their old and ailing parents and grandparents.<sup>7</sup>

How the world will cope with a rising elderly population remains to be seen. While not furthering alarmist arguments, it is clear that younger groups will be entrusted with larger and graver responsibilities than now. Many nations are likely to promulgate laws requiring children, sons and/or daughters, depending upon the descent principle recognized by society, to take proper care of their parents in their dotage. Infringement of such laws will gradually become a serious offence as the elderly population becomes more 'visible' (demographically as well as politically) and its problems multiply manifold.

Old age is a cultural construction, in much the same way as are the other phases ('vocations') of life. For heuristic purposes, we have devised concepts like chronological age, biological age, psychic or mental age, social age, and many others. Since these are our constructions, each of them relevant to a specific discipline, problems are likely to surface when a specific categorization of age is sought to be harmonized with another. Take for example chronological age with social age; while the former is reckoned in years counted from the date of birth, the latter (social age) grades life in terms of activities an individual is supposed to carry out from birth to death.

7 See Kumkum Srivastava and V.K. Srivastava, 'When Peers are no More Some Rambling Thoughts on Old Age', *The Anthropologist* 1(1), 1999, pp 25-35

A synchronization of chronological age with social age results in foregrounding normative propositions like 'girls should get married before they turn 25', or that 'one should retire at the age of 60'. In other words, activities are spread out according to the presumed conception of the chronological age.

One can easily visualise increasing conflict in situations when a global extension of chronological age is unmatched by a corresponding change in social age. In Britain, for example, the age of compulsory retirement for most men is 65, while for women it is 60; this despite the fact that women outlive men by several years.<sup>8</sup> Many European nations today favour a reduction in retirement age as a possible solution to ever-increasing unemployment. In these contexts, the beginning of old age coincides with retirement and is associated with particular kinds of welfare benefits, such as provident fund, pension, leave encashment, gratuity, and insurance payments.

When people retire at the age of 60 (or 65 as in these countries), they are invariably healthy and can still work for long hours and under pressure of time. They can easily continue with the same job for another decade or so without any substantial loss of efficiency. Retirement, thus, creates social, economic, and psychological problems for such individuals and quite often for members of their households.<sup>9</sup> A conflict situation arises because of a clear mismatch between chronological age and the corresponding gradation of social

8. Anthony Giddens, *Sociology*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1989, p. 598.

9. See Herbert S. Parnes, *Retirement Among American Men*, Lexington Books, Lexington, Mass., 1985; John van Willigen, *Getting Some Age on Me*, The University Press of Kentucky, 1989.

age. When the average life expectancy in India was 52, the retirement age for central university teachers was 65; this remains the same despite an increase in longevity.

It is against the dialectics of these two relations that we can understand ageism. To recapitulate, it is in relation to younger and middle-aged citizens, and second, in the relation between different age categories, that ageism makes sense. Ageism may be defined as discrimination against people on the basis of their age. It is an ideology much in the same way as sexism and racism.<sup>10</sup>

To retire women at 60 and men at 65 because of a perceived decline in their working ability and output is an example of the practice of sexism. To proclaim that people of a particular race are endowed with lower intelligent quotient than others indicates racism. Similarly, there are many stereotypes of older people. In Britain it is commonly believed that 'most of the over sixty-fives are in hospitals or homes for the elderly; that a high proportion are senile; that older workers are less competent than younger ones.'<sup>11</sup> It is likely that many of these beliefs might have come to dominate our consciousness because the young and middle aged citizens felt threatened about their future once they found that the coveted positions were being monopolized by older people. Such perceptions are equally widespread even in those social situations where the notion of retirement does not apply, like those relating to the world of arts and politics.

Robert Atchley rebuts many of the ageist stereotypes prevalent in English society. He points out that 95% of people over 65 live in private

10 Giddens, op. cit, 1989, p. 600

11. Ibid, 1989

dwelling and not in hospitals or homes for the elderly. Less than 7% of those over the age of 80 show pronounced symptoms of senile degeneration. The working ability and attendance records of workers over 60 are often superior to those of younger age groups.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, many tasks require experience for their accomplishment. In many cases, younger workers need to be guided by their senior colleagues. In a society marked by individualism, potential hostility between the younger and older age groups can be mediated by pointing out that their relationship is analogous to the one between the individual and culture; the former is high in energy, the latter in information. The young are the repository of energy, the old of knowledge; a synergism exists between the two similar to the interdependence between the individual and culture.

**M**any activist groups of older citizens have come into existence to combat ageism in the West. As the old form a larger proportion of the population they are likely to acquire greater political influence. In the US they have already created a powerful political lobby. Similar developments are visible in Britain. The scenario is set for a manifestation of antagonism between the younger and older citizens. One of the questions raised by an article in the *National Geographic* (1997) was, 'How would future generations fare in a world where the elderly – no matter how beloved – refused to depart?'

Growing ageism can be checked by encouraging sociological measures and strengthening institutions. Giddens (1989: 600) writes: 'A redefinition of the value and contribution

of older people would increase the general level of social tolerance. Benefits at the moment monopolized by the young and middle-aged might perhaps become more evenly distributed in the future. At the moment, people in these age groups have a monopoly over education, work, power and material rewards. A more even distribution of these, from which older people can draw just as much profit as younger individuals, would be in the interests of social justice.' For bringing into existence a just society, a revolution in ethical and moral dimensions is imperative, and the family can play a big role in heralding it.

The problems of the old are usually expected to accentuate when joint families and households break down. This argument is similar to the one put forward by the Zagreb anthropologist in Lawrence Cohen's book, who believed that since the North-Eastern Indian hill community he had researched did not have 'bad families' (it had joint families) there was no senility, no dementia, no Alzheimer's, no 'crazy oldies'.<sup>13</sup>

**S**uch views are normally forwarded by those who base themselves on a middle class picture of society and take for granted that something resembling a joint family was common to all strata of traditional society. In this they are mistaken. Social anthropologists and sociologists have abundantly shown that the emergence and social reproduction of the joint family is predicated on specific conjunctions of ideological and material factors.<sup>14</sup> Economic and ideational inequalities characterized all traditional societies. As an institution, the

joint family was far from being common in all layers of society; that even in the landed, propertied groups, it was not prevalent at all points of time. After all the family, like any other institution, is a process in time.

Equally, it is wrong to assume that older persons were always respected and honoured in traditional societies. Emile Durkheim, the French sociologist, in his study of the sociological causes of suicide, documented cases from societies where the elderly not needed for the tasks of production and other work, were obliged to kill themselves. Durkheim called this an 'obligatory altruistic suicide'.<sup>15</sup>

**E**ven the concept of renunciation, so central to the understanding of Hinduism, was probably devised as a way to keep the elderly out of the mundane society, dominated by the young and middle-aged. Perhaps at the latent level, renunciation was an ideological instrument to separate the young and middle-aged from the elderly, so that the people on their way out did not meddle with the affairs of the world which were the prerogatives of the people in the vocation of the householder (*grahastashrama*). Scholars writing on non-renunciation have shown the crucial importance of the householder (the young and the middle-aged) in perpetuating the economic and social life of the community.<sup>16</sup>

It is wrong to assume that the position of the patriarch, honorifically called *karta*, of an upper caste and class joint family, exemplified the typical pattern of a traditional society. Ethnographers have documented

13. Lawrence Cohen, *No Ageing in India: Modernity, Senility and the Family*, Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 16-17

14. See A. M. Shah, *The Family in India. Critical Essays*, Orient Longman, 1998

15. Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, (first published 1897, 1952 ed)

16. T. N. Madan, *Non-renunciation: Themes and Interpretation of Hindu Culture*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1987

12. Robert Atchley, *Social Forces and Ageing*, Wadsworth, Belmont, 1985; Also see Giddens, 1989, pp. 598-600

numerous cases of maltreatment of the old people, in verbal and physical terms, in villages which stereotypically are supposed to mete out the best treatment to their elderly population. Heise *et al.* have documented many cases of elder abuse, especially of widows, in the US (the only country for which such data is now available).<sup>17</sup>

During fieldwork with Rajasthan villagers, I routinely encountered situations where the elderly were abused for failing to do an assigned task to the satisfaction of others. They were often sternly admonished by their descendants to mind their own affairs. Little interest was paid to their suggestions. Often they were interrupted and told to be as pithy as possible. No wonder, whenever they found a listener (a role best performed by social anthropologists and sociologists), narrations of their life-event and stories were literally ceaseless.

Otherwise, the old people were a 'muted lot', to borrow the apt words of Edwin Ardener – their tongues were tied and lips pursed because of the structure of dominance. It was not that they did not speak, or put forward their point of view, but that they remained unheard. And if bed-ridden, their sons and daughters-in-law who served them grudgingly, routinely cursed them for their predicament, their *karma*. The glorification of the aged in traditional societies is perhaps more of an assumption than an ethnographically supported fact.

Even though most episodes of elderly maltreatment take place within the family, it nevertheless remains the most important institution for initiating an ideational revolution in society to effectively combat ageism. The role of the family in

bringing up new generations of people is fundamental. Many values and ethical norms are inculcated in the young by the family. Children are the personalization of the sub-culture of the family in which they have been socialized. To combat ageism and to provide its critique we need to inculcate a view of life as a process; the family can play a central role in disseminating this ideology.

The proposed National Policy for Older Persons highlights (i) the need to regard life as a continuum and the age after 60 as another phase; and (ii) the need to create an age-integrated society with strong bonds between different generations and thereby create conditions suitable for the elderly to stay with their families. Both these aims can be best realized with the active intervention of the family.

Stronger bonds between generations can be created not by the measure of fiat, in the sense of making senior citizens press legal claims against their children for not taking adequate care of them in their old age, but by bringing about endogenous changes. The desire to take proper care of one's parents and grandparents should emanate from within, from a particular ethical (i.e., human) viewpoint, instead of being imposed and sanctioned from outside.

'Within' changes carry conviction. Thus the conditions suitable for the elderly to stay with their families are not premised on a utilitarian model of a good samaritan, baby-sitting and policing the household, answering telephone calls, and handling domestic chores. Kinship, love and affection should have priority over economy, utility and profit. Within this framework, I keep my mother with me because I love her and not because she takes care of my children. She baby-sits, for she is a member of the house-

hold and not the other way round. The potential of the elderly has first of all to be acknowledged in the family. It is within the family, rather than through the state, that we can visualise a possibility of ameliorating the condition of the elderly.

To sum up, the definition of the concept of age is largely dependent upon the nature of the discipline; hence we speak of the biological, sociological and psychological conceptions of age. Old age is also culturally constituted; its connotation in a simple society may be qualitatively different from that in a complex modern society.

In recent years, older people, who now constitute a large proportion of the population of the industrial society, have started to press for greater recognition of their distinctive interests and needs. The struggle against ageism is an important aspect of this development. The family, as an institution, can play an exemplary role in fighting against ageism, and in the realization of many aspects which are now enshrined in the proposed National Policy for the Older Persons by inculcating a developmentally oriented view of life in succeeding generations.

One possible way of bringing the elderly population into the mainstream of society is through furthering an ideological revolution at the level of family. By focusing on the family, the intention is not to undermine the sociological importance of 'family-like' institutions, such as homes for the aged. However, we should not forget that a move to these homes may amount to announcing to the world that an inmate has produced unfilial children. No older person would like to make his children a butt of ridicule. I learnt this from my conversations with the old people in south Delhi and rural Rajasthan.

17 L. Heise *et al.*, *Violence Against Women: The Hidden Health Burden*, World Bank Discussion Paper, 1994.

# Social ageing in India and America

JOHN VAN WILLIGEN

*'In India we have the joint family system, in the West you have old age homes. India is better'*

I have completed two very similar research projects on social ageing, one in America and one in India. My research work involved going back and forth between ageing research in both the United States and India for about the last 12 years. During this period I participated in scholarly discourse about ageing, the meaning of social research on ageing, and overall societal trends.

In this essay I will discuss some perceptions formed by these experiences. Many of my opinions derive from the juxtaposition of what I learned from those two research experiences and the way that Indian and American people regard each other in terms of ageing. I have been struck by the way Indian people perceive the situation of older people in India and the United States and how they evaluate that difference. The opening quote represents one viewpoint that

I have frequently heard when interviewing people in India. I discuss some of these contrasts, including Indian perceptions of the United States compared to my perceptions of the United States and my view of Indian self-perceptions as they compare to what actually seems to be occurring to older people in India.

Much of this relates to my trying to figure out the reality and dynamic of the joint family and older people in India. Most Indian research scholars have a view about ageing in the United States which is suffused with stereotypes, and if not wrong only partially true. More often than not this is conveyed through smug expressions of India's 'moral superiority' and 'spiritual development' in contrast to the 'materialism' and 'moral decline' of the West.

The other side of the equation involves understanding the conceptions westerners have, both about the Indian family as a place for ageing and their own relations with their parents. Most westerners tend to romanticize

he Indian joint family while being airily self-critical about their ability to are for their parents.

In India, with some limited exceptions, ageing researchers place a high value on the joint family. I always thought that they do so uncritically. Very much going against the grain, K. G. Desai, now retired from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Mumbai, once wrote that the joint family in India represents a forced choice, made because of inadequate retirement income that necessitates pooling, and expensive housing that compels sharing quarters. He concluded that if people had adequate assets they would live in nuclear family households.

In contrast to Desai's view, based on my research and the experience of living with a three-generation family in Delhi for many months, I came to the conclusion that a joint family was a good situation within which to grow old. It has been my experience that people are, for the most part, helpful and loving and that there were a lot of interesting things going on. It was a good place to be very old and very young.

My first social ageing research experience was in the United States. I studied rural people in a county near where I work at the University of Kentucky. Many families were involved in farming and there were no industrial jobs in the county. The annual production cycles of tobacco, corn, hay and beef cattle had an important impact on the flow of life. Many people had active religious lives and were concerned about their spiritual development, which was important to them. When Indians spoke of the materialism of the West, I automatically thought of the people I researched in rural Kentucky. It wasn't that way at all. They would attend church most

Sunday mornings where they would listen to the preacher offer his or her views concerning the moral implications of the congregation's behaviour and how they could 'grow in Christ'. The 'religious discourse' would invariably end with an invitation to the congregants to 'publicly declare Christ as their saviour' and to submit to the sacrament of baptism.

Further, there was little tendency to conspicuously display wealth. After I got more familiar with the community, I could observe groups interacting which would include people the local equivalent of *crorepatis* as well as those who were more or less poor tenant farmers. They dressed the same and talked the same. Distinctions based on wealth were subtle and expressions of materialistic values were very subdued. Communicating equality represented an important value. The image of American materialism would be challenged by the experience of doing research in a place like this.

The situation of older people in this county was coloured by demography and migration. The percentage of older people was high. No broad-based, fertile, population pyramid here. It was more like a column. While some seemed to attribute the age structure to increased longevity, it was more a matter of out-migration. Many younger people were forced to move away because of limited employment and the relatively poor income provided by agriculture. Because of this the average age of the county was high and getting higher. In this rural American community, as everywhere else it seems, demography is an important factor structuring the nature of lives of ageing people. Often when we interviewed older people they lamented the fact that their children and other young people had to leave the community in

order to support themselves. Old people would often talk about the lack of jobs for the youth rather than problems more associated with their age mates. The community represented a kind of demographic shell. The population was old.

Just as I was finishing the book about my Kentucky research, I got a Fulbright lectureship for India. This was not totally out of the blue as I had studied Hindi while a graduate student in anthropology and had intended to do my dissertation in India, although I never was able to. While lecturing about applied anthropology at Delhi University, a faculty member in psychology, N. K. Chadha, suggested that we collaborate on a research project. As I was just in the last stages of completing the Kentucky book, I suggested that we do a similar study in India. It was a good time for such a project, as there had been little research work on older people at that time. There was increasing unease about the apparently rapidly ageing Indian population. Now, ten years later, there is a lot of research and many publications, mostly by psychologists.

The neighbourhood we studied was established in the early 1950s, mostly by people who had migrated to Delhi from the Punjab during Partition. The circumstance of the neighbourhood's creation also relates to the population being mostly well-off business families. One effect of this was that most households consisted of joint families. It was interesting for me to deal with a sample in which there was such a big commitment to joint families. Chadha and I found that over 80% of the households were joint, mostly three generation, or formed of families of brothers. Had I limited my understanding to only the research from this study, I would have concluded that joint families in India

were robust and important. However, even in this setting, people said that the joint family was declining in importance or decreasing in frequency.

**T**he idea that the joint family is disappearing is a widespread one. Most books published on ageing topics in India assert it. It has come to be a kind of standard introduction expressed as a forgone conclusion. This is not to say that there is much high quality evidence that this is true; it's just that many people lament the joint family's demise. The 'breakdown' in the joint family system is a recurring theme. I agree with Lawrence Cohen, an American medical anthropologist who has called the 'decline of the joint family' the central narrative of Indian gerontology.

However, there doesn't actually seem to be any research that conclusively demonstrates that the frequency of joint families is today less in India than in the past. On average, older Indians live in large households compared to Americans. I have seen citations from national surveys indicating that only 6% of the elderly population of India lives alone or with non-relatives. A comparable statistic for Americans from good national level data is just over 40%.

Statistics from India about co-residence indicate that joint family living is still common for old people. I probably overrate the importance of co-residence rather than family attachments, possibly because it is relatively easy to study who lives with who and more difficult to investigate family attachments. I assume that when people say that the joint family is disappearing, they are referring to something beyond 'mere living together'. I imagine that the way power and authority are structured in the household is an important part of the transformation and that people in

joint families are increasingly 'just living together.'

In fact, every once in a while I still get a glimpse of the 'real joint family' pattern marked by robust patriarchal authority and large size. It seems clear that in spite of large co-resident households in the present, there is substantial difference with the situation in the past: more individualism, less pooling or sharing of assets, less gender inequality. Maybe it is true that mere co-residence is not that important and that the issue is something more like familial love, cooperation and commitment. Ironically, Indian interpretations of the American situation seem to focus on the American pattern of nuclear household residence irrespective of issues of commitment, familial love and cooperation. American families too exhibit familial love, cooperation and commitment; it's just that they don't live in the same houses or even in the same city.

**I** think co-residence is confused with family commitment. In my view Indians tend to look at American families in terms of the meaning they attach to the co-residence pattern found in America. Families who don't live together may in fact be quite committed to each other. My wife and I see or talk with our married daughters about once a week. We have no sons. When an acquaintance from India suggested that I must be lonely because I don't see them more frequently, I recall thinking facetiously, 'we use email'.

The Kentuckians whom I studied are family-oriented, yet they tend to live in nuclear family settings or alone. What do I mean by family orientation? They actively maintain ties of love, respect and support in spite of not living together. They do this by financing their children's education beyond high school

(Rs 800,000-1,000,000); using influence and connections to get their children jobs, caring for grandchildren; inviting the family for Sunday dinner; nursing older relatives when they get sick; paying for their children's marriage; and making efforts to have people attend church together, among many other things. In Kentucky there is even a tradition of having family reunions for those that live elsewhere. In short, they express in strong terms a commitment to each other's welfare, it's just that they don't live with each other, especially after they graduate from high school.

**T**hey don't lament this. 'He still lives with his parents' is seen as some kind of low-level character flaw for anybody, especially a boy past high school. I recall that when my parents were alive they expressed the central American ageing narrative and often talked about not being a burden. They were proud of the fact that I did not have to support them in their old age. My father often teased me by suggesting that they would move in with my wife and I. They accomplished their independence, of which they were proud, through their savings and social security. As they got old it was more likely that they would send me money rather than the other way around. As their health declined, my sister and I began to do more and more for them. Our last act of caring was burying my father's ashes in a cemetery surrounded by family members from all over America.

The two communities saw families in very different temporal frameworks; existentially the Kentuckians and the Delhites present an interesting point of contrast. Given the religious beliefs found in the Kentucky community, people conceived that family groups could be together for eternity. As Christians, they saw themselves



going to heaven as individuals and being in contact. They spoke of seeing each other on the 'other side'. In fact, for some this represented a motivation to encourage younger family members to take up religious life and to tend to their spiritual development and salvation.

**W**hile I have found Indians to be expressive about the life of older people in America, Americans tend to have fewer opinions specifically focused on the situation of older people in India. If anything the tendency is to think of India as a country of young people while ignoring the large and rapidly growing older segment of the population. This relates to perceptions and misunderstandings about the implications of the differences in life expectancy between the two countries. There are those who confuse life expectancy with life maximum. This is a naive but common view. Beyond that is a tendency to take a romantic view of family life in Asia. Americans see India as a place where older people are treated with respect and honour in the context of extended families. Importantly, these romantics ignore the fact that structurally these families require a patriarchal bias. Power and wealth is concentrated in the hands of males – fathers and sons – and that the lives of women can be very restrictive.

It has been my experience that people in India closely associate nuclear family living arrangements and loneliness. I do think nuclear family life increases the risk of social isolation generally. At the same time loneliness is not a necessary outcome of a nuclear family based life strategy. In the India research we found that those who lived in nuclear families usually had more ties with people outside the household. I suppose you could say that they compensated for their somewhat diminished social situation.

In fact their overall social network, including household ties, was slightly larger than of those living in joint family settings in the neighbourhood.

I found that the average size of older people's social network in both Delhi and Kentucky are identical. The Kentuckians lived in small households, often alone, while the Delhites mostly lived in joint family households.

**J**ointness requires wealth. It is quite clear that joint families are not as strong or frequent among poor people and landless rural people. It is also related to the economic strategy that the family uses. Jointness is less common among the salaried class like government servants. This is what the ageing research literature shows clearly. I always think of this when an Indian colleague makes the 'you have old age homes we have joint families' statement. Only a certain percentage of people live in these kinds of families. Certainly if you are poor there is a greater chance that you will be socially isolated. This is also apparent in certain kinds of upper-middle class families. I even learnt that the kind of household you live in largely depends on what kind of a neighbourhood you live in Delhi. For a while I rented a flat in a better south Delhi neighbourhood and learnt that better-off, older people, mostly women, lived alone. The wealthy and the poor share certain qualities in this regard.

Jointness requires a patriarchal social structure. The key to a joint family is the capacity to capture the love and attention of daughters-in-law. In America there are no daughters-in-law in the Indian sense. The 'joint family set up' is contingent on values-laws-practices that help men capture the labour of women, especially daughters-in-laws and have it appear morally good.

What do the Americans do? The view communicated by the opening statement that somehow the American 'old age home' is equivalent to the joint family is inconsistent with reality. India may well be a better place to age socially, but in America most old people don't live in 'old age homes'. The percentage is actually quite small. About 5% of the population 65 and over live in what are called nursing homes in the United States. The nursing home population is old, three out of four are 75 years or older. A large portion of the population is women. 34% of nursing home residents are women 85 and older. People in American nursing homes are chronically ill. They receive nursing care. I think Indian 'old age homes' are something like what Americans call 'assisted living'. These are fairly common. Usually this entails all the residents eating together and perhaps benefiting from some sort of social programmes and outings organized by the institution.

**T**he number of persons living in old age homes in India must be very small. HelpAge India's 1995 national directory of old age homes in India based on extensive national survey, found only 12,702 residents. At the same time it showed that the number of residents was increasing and that there was a national shortage of beds. The distribution of old age home beds is highly variable from state to state in India, reflecting underlying demography. The relative availability is much higher in the South where populations have begun the demographic transition to lower fertility and lower mortality. When one looks at the distribution of this problem, one tends to think in terms of the primacy of demography. At this point we can assert the 'demography is not destiny' *mantra*, common in the

political action circles around ageing in the United States.

Further, some say that the pro-joint family rhetoric represents a denial of the emerging reality which keeps service providers and policy makers from working aggressively on the welfare problems of all older people. A reliance on the idea that the joint family will take care of older people would be especially hard on the destitute specifically and the poor generally.

We are largely forced by circumstances into certain patterns of arrangement of social life. Our values and self-concepts fit our circumstances only with considerable lag. Both in India and the United States there is a tendency to view this re-arrangement of domestic affairs as a kind of moral crisis rather than a somewhat inevitable fallout of demographic change.

It appears that family structures in India and the U.S. may be converging. As India's age demography transforms toward the pattern found in more heavily industrialized countries, the situation of older people will converge even more. India may well be on its way toward the kind of social circumstance experienced by older people in industrialized countries.

An ageing policy based on the idea that the joint family will sustain the needs of older people is problematic for these reasons: (i) large segments of the population do not have access to joint family life; (ii) the joint family requires a high extraction of women's energies who are often not vested in family property; and (iii) the family may be declining. There needs to be a more objective assessment of the situation of older people in order to anticipate societal needs in a reasonable way. This includes an objective understanding of the demography of age and the conditions of ageing for all segments of society as opposed to the reliance on wishful thinking and myth.

## Ageing pains

SMITA KISHORE

AGEING is both a universal and a natural process. It is a change in demographic structure, a rise in the proportion of the aged population as compared to the overall population that has made them a highly visible section today. The United Nations declared the year 1999 as the International Year for Older Persons; the Indian government announced a National Policy for the Aged. Popular magazines, newspapers, radio and televisions have write-ups and programmes on the aged. The problem has now entered centre stage.

The media, however, has its own limitations and is able to provide, at best, a broad picture and at worst a homogenized perception of the aged. This paper based on fieldwork carried out between 1995-1997 in a north Indian city, attempts to capture the voices of the aged themselves. It is an effort to understand how the aged perceive their own situation.

This paper focuses on the middle class, and within the middle class the retired professional. A great deal of debate has centred around the extended family versus the nuclear family

but little is available on the everyday aspects of family life in modern India. An attempt is therefore made to present the narratives of the aged and to capture the shifts in their daily lives.

**T**his is not to suggest that the problems of the urban middle class aged are universal. I make this point because of the sharp vertical and horizontal divisions that mark Indian society. Though the middle class forms but a small proportion of the overall aged population, it is not only a dominant section, a reference model for society (though not always), but is also a section that has undergone dramatic socio-economic changes in recent decades.

The middle classes have experienced greater social mobility in their own lives as compared to their parents. Their children too have tended to break away from traditionally defined ways. A desire for upward mobility and an emphasis on education has meant, for many, a migration of children to bigger cities, both within and outside the country. They also constitute the first generation retirees who are trying to work out new norms and behaviour patterns. Further, they are characterized by reflexivity, that is, they think about and discuss their problems. This paper confines its attention to the changing nature and quality of relationships in the family and the implications this has for the urban middle class aged.

As Shah<sup>1</sup> points out, this is historically a modern and rapidly growing section among whom the institution of joint household though strong in the past is now becoming weak. It has been under the maximum impact of the ideology of individualism. It is articulate and makes its presence felt

in the media, the bureaucracy and in the learned professions. It tends to perceive its problems as those of the entire society.

Though many studies have pointed out the role of the family for the elderly population, it was only during my field study that I understood its importance. This is not to deny other important facets related to the issue of ageing, but that family roles and relationships are fundamental factors affecting their daily lives as they provide a meaningful social role and emotional satisfaction after retirement.

In recent decades there has been a general debate about the changes taking place in the institution of the family with sociological literature<sup>2</sup> talking about the demise of the extended family, earlier the sole caretaker of the aged, and its replacement by an unstable nuclear family. Of late, this understanding has been criticized by those who argue that the concept of an isolated nuclear family represents more fiction than fact. Without underestimating some changes in structure, it is more important to look at the changes taking place in the function of the family. The first part of the paper looks at the changing nature of lived relationship with children, while the second dwells on the relationship between the spouses.

**I** first look at the relationship of the retirees with their children and their participation in various aspects of daily living. Most of the retirees in this study lived in a 'modified extended family'<sup>3</sup> where families, though spatially dispersed, score high on contact, interaction and change. Although many of them were positive about the concept of joint living, in practice they

preferred the extended modified family. Sussman refers to this desire of the elderly to be close to relatives but not with them as 'intimacy at a distance'.<sup>4</sup> An elderly person expressed this clearly: 'I feel it is better to have an independent household. I prefer the idea of spending weekends together with the children and have a healthy relationship, rather than live together and have ill-feelings towards each other.' Yet another stated: 'I feel it is not the quantity but the quality of time spent together that really matters.' 'Living in the joint family is no guarantee that one is taken care of... values have changed, joint living may sound good but it may not be so rosy. Living independently does not mean that the love, affection and care factors have disappeared.'

'As a result of education, economic independence and changing values there may be conflict between the younger and older generations regarding small things like methods of cooking, preparing the menu between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. So it is in fact better to maintain a nuclear set.'

**T**here was agreement that it was difficult to get along with the younger generation because of their different ways of thinking and doing things. One response was: 'Everything said and done... there does exist a generation gap. But if elders keep their mouths

*Destiny*, Harper, New York, 1959; A. Ross, *The Hindu Family in its Urban Setting*, Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1961.

3. A.C. Kerckhoff, Nuclear and Extended Family Relationships: Normative and Behaviour Analysis, in E. Shanas and G. Streib (eds), *Social Structure and Family: Generational Relations*, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, pp 93-112

4. M.B. Sussman, The Family Life of Old People, in R.H. Binstock and E. Shanas (eds), *Handbook of Ageing and Social Sciences*, Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., New York, 1976, p 222.

1. A.M. Shah, *The Family in India: Critical Essays*, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1998, pp. 76-77.

2. E.W. Burgess and H.J. Locke, *The Family*, American Book, New York, 1945; T. Parsons, The Social Structure of the Family, in R.N. Anshan (ed), *The Family: Its Function and*

closed, the situation remains in control.' Another one felt that: 'Parents are expected to make all the adjustments. If we stay together we are taken for granted, as if we don't have our own viewpoints.'

**T**he frequency of visits was higher during the festival seasons and in case of an emergency. Though mutual, the retirees clearly preferred that their children visit them rather than the other way round. They also wanted the frequency of visits to increase, though many of the children have settled abroad.

For some, their children's achievement was a source of pride: 'My son is brilliant. Since childhood he was of an independent nature. He got selected in one of the topmost universities in the States, did his Masters in business administration from there and is now placed highly... we feel proud of him. But at times we do miss him... he is too busy to visit us regularly. It has been almost six years since he last visited India. Though we do visit him once a year, he gets very little time to spend with us.' Another one was despondent: 'What can the younger generation achieve in this country?' But for another: 'My daughter is a very successful doctor in the US. Why should I worry?'

However, they admitted to feeling lonely and sad because the children were so far away and wished that they stayed somewhere nearby. Clearly a desire for proximity, fear of actual living together and the safety of being able to boast about them at a distance was all present simultaneously.

Another comment reads as: 'Both my son and daughter study abroad. Whenever my daughter or daughter-in-law are expecting we are sent the tickets beforehand. Both of us go for a time period after which their in-laws go for another six months...

the baby-sitters are very expensive and also where can one get homely care by paying.' Some felt that: 'You take care, give your time, energy, love. After all they are your children. Still you can hear comments of dissatisfaction. It really hurts. But what to do... after all we are parents.'

When quizzed about the degree of agreement on various issues, most retirees felt that prior to retirement their children tended to either agree with them or preferred to keep silent in the face of disagreement. But after retirement the attitude changed with discussions and conversations with children usually resulting in heated arguments. It was the aged who tended to compromise even on small issues like choice of TV channels, what to eat for lunch or dinner. This compromise, however, was not without resentment: 'Just because one is old, one is expected to compromise on every small issue. My wife argues that see you are mature, old, he is a child and so on... as if once you grow old you are expected to lose interest, act as a saint.'

**A**part from the frequency of visits and quality of conversation, it is also important to understand the process of decision making and the advisory role in the family. Before retirement it was solely the prerogative of the bread winner but after retirement it is more a matter between son and wife and does not extend to them. The young do not consult their parents before deciding on most matters. Some of the responses made this clear: 'They don't even bother to discuss with us, what are you talking about taking decisions. Husband and wife decide amongst themselves and only inform us of their decision.'

Another felt: 'They think they are more rational, smart and well educated and hence can think for them-

selves. I feel that as soon as a person retires he should take a back seat and accept a passive role if he wants to maintain even a little bit of respect.'

**O**thers expressed their limited role in decision making: 'No, we don't decide on anything except for my wife and myself. My children come and inform us about their choice and we passively agree. After all, what is the use of showing annoyance except for troubling yourself and disturbing the peace within the family.' Most of them reported giving advice only when asked to since most of the time their concerns were not taken seriously. 'See, you put in so much of effort and pain to think about them, after all they are children. But what you get in return is humiliation. They turn a deaf ear and act as if they know the ins and outs of everything and need no advice.' 'I advice only when it is specially sought for, otherwise they are free to do what they think is right.' Another felt that: Once your children become economically independent, get married, have children, you should yourself withdraw from the role of advising and directing, if you want the respect to remain intact.' 'They think they are the best judge and we are outdated.'

An important observation to emerge from the interviews was that married daughters are increasingly playing an important role in taking care of their old parents. In fact, parents are happy to accept the help of daughters rather than sons: 'Earlier we stayed alone, but recently my daughter and her family has shifted to the town. In fact, my daughter forced her husband to get a transfer so that she could be near us. From that time onwards she has taken over all my responsibilities. Though she stays almost 10 kms away from the house, she drops in every other day with something she has cooked. My married

son stays close by, but he hardly gets time to visit us. Even when he does, he is more like a guest. The only help he can think of extending is financial.'

They also stressed the point that daughters not only provide care willingly, but also receive every form of help from parents as and when required. As Jerrome suggests, besides giving help daughters also receive greater help than the sons, at least in areas of childcare – the act of caring means caring about as well as caring for.<sup>5</sup> It seems that the moral responsibility, out of sheer affection and love, falls more on the daughters than on sons, which is also acceptable to the parents.

**A**nother important observation to emerge was that the elderly did not like the idea of accepting financial help from children. Many of them saw self support as important for maintaining self-respect. 'By God's grace, even after retirement, my economic position is all right. Even now I have the capacity to help my children in times of need. I cannot imagine taking financial help from them at any point of time. What will be my position in the family as a dependant person? I could not take that kind of humiliation.'

When unwell the elders expect help from children, especially daughters, only to the extent that it does not become a burden on them. 'We take care of each other... at times children do come over, but one cannot expect them to disrupt their daily routine and take care permanently.' Those with children staying in the same city had a more active give and take relationship. However, nearly all stressed that it was unimportant for children to

provide material help, but that they ought to show affection, love, keep in touch and give due respect. 'Believe me, although retirement has resulted in reduced income, it is sufficient for the two of us – me and my wife. I believe that one should cut ones coat according to the available cloth... the question of help from children does not arise. After all, it is the duty of parents to look after their children, at least financially. If there is anything that I expect from them, it is respect and care.'

**F**or an overall understanding of family life, the relationship of the retirees with their spouse becomes important. The family in the West focuses on the husband-wife relationship, i.e. conjugal ties, while in Indian society family means strong ties with children. However, this study points towards a reaffirmation of spouse ties, especially after retirement – a shift from consanguineous to conjugal ties. Though most of the spouses were non-working, but even for those who did work, retirement did not pose a problem as they continued with the role of homemakers. But for almost all women the retirement of husbands was certainly seen as a period of crisis and transition. 'No matter how positively one thinks, it is definitely a period of transition. All of a sudden you are left with so much of free time and nothing concrete to do.'

Many respondents pointed to the problem of declining standards of living and to reduced income: 'Most of those retired are still capable of working. A person who has enjoyed power, prestige, status and comfort both at the workplace and home, is suddenly required to adjust to the loss in income, living standard... where does one get a full-time paid servant these days? Even they seem to be interested in government jobs.'

It was also interesting to see how elderly couples adjust their lives and routines after retirement. In most cases a loosening of the rigid definition of 'male work' and 'female work' was noticed. In general the husbands increased their participation in household activities, especially male oriented work like payment of bills, buying grocery and so on. Although most spouses appreciated the shouldering of household responsibilities by husbands, an overindulgence in the domestic space was often unwelcome. 'I dislike the interference in my domestic chores, especially comments like the room is not properly dusted, what should be cooked and so on. After all, I have grown old doing these things. I know my work well. The problem is that there is plenty of free time and nothing really to be done, no regular routine of going to the office, so most of the time he tries to interfere in my affairs. What does he know of buying vegetables, what to cook and how to cook? But he does not hesitate in giving directions and analyzing critically. This becomes more of a burden.'

**A**nother responded: 'When it comes to kitchen work, especially cooking, I prefer doing it on my own.' Not only this, the usual answer to the question, What do you do in your free time was, 'I don't get even a minute to sit and take rest... a woman's work never finishes... at times even the whole day seems less.'

Most of the spouses observed changes in their husbands' behaviour after retirement, although no pattern was noticed. Some of the responses were: 'He has become so critical of every small detail – be it family, children, cooking or politics.' 'He has become more helpful, giving extra time to household chores. But then I feel very bad seeing him do this work.'

5. D. Jerrome, *Intimate Relationship*, in J. Bond and P. Coleman (eds), *Ageing in Society: An Introduction to Social Gerontology*, Sage, London, 1990, pp 185-195.

In his service years, he never even picked up a thing, everything was ready.' 'Earlier he used to be so calm and quiet and understanding but now it is a different story. He gets irritated so easily, he has become very short-tempered.'

**T**hough the wives occasionally made negative comments about their husbands' behaviour, they could not tolerate any criticism or disrespect from their children. 'Yes, I understand that at times he gets irritated with the children. I try to pacify him but I do not like my children answering back. So what if he has retired, we are old. Could we ever think of behaving like this with our parents?' 'I do not like my children interfering in our matters. Even if he says something which sounds out of place, it is for me to correct but certainly not my children. I am not ready for any disrespect shown to my husband.'

In case of illness the main caregiving function was performed by spouses. For most of them help is usually mutual between husband and wife. Often they do not ask for help unless compelled. An elderly woman commented: 'My husband usually takes care of me when I fall sick. You know, he gets nervous even if I catch a bit of a cold and cough or temperature. It is only when our sickness requires prolonged care that we bother our children. Normally we do not ask for help. Everybody, including our children, has their own families, their own lives. Why trouble them unnecessarily.'

Little direct exchange of help was observed except by spouses, and children in case of an emergency. Though both sexes showed an adjustment to the post retirement years, women were better adjusted than men, and often tended to become more dependent on their wives, especially

emotionally, for all their needs. It was also interesting to notice how both partners tended to become more attached and devoted to each other. 'I cannot imagine life without him. We have had our share of fights, but now we are so dependent on each other. I know children are there to take care of us but I guess nobody can give the company and contentment that a spouse can, especially in old age.' 'I think we are the best of companions, sharing every aspect of life in its minute details. I wonder what will happen to him when I am not around.'

One of the retirees commented: 'You won't believe it, retirement has brought us closer. Earlier we were too busy with work and worrying about the children. Now that all of them are settled, we two are by ourselves to share every sorrow and happiness together.'

**T**he devotion and love expressed for each other in old age was incredible, possibly because of stability in life, companionship over the years, and shared experiences. As is well established, during child rearing years the marriage relationship is subordinate to the demands of children, and husband-wife tend to grow apart.<sup>6</sup> The frequency of marital interaction reportedly increases in post parental years, particularly after retirement.

In old age, companionship and the freedom to express one's feelings without being judged becomes the most satisfying aspect of married life. This paper highlights the voices of the aged in the hope that this ethnographic material may help in providing important clues to understanding the life of the aged.

6. cf M.F. Lowenthal and B. Robinson, Social Networks and Isolation, in R.H. Binstock and E. Shanas (eds), *Handbook of Ageing and Social Sciences*, Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., New York, 1976, p. 434

# Demographic transition

ASHISH BOSE

THE 21st century will witness a gradual transition to an ageing society the world over. The process which first started in low fertility western societies and in Japan is now spreading to the developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Countries like China and India will not only be at the forefront in terms of absolute number of total population, but also in terms of absolute number of the elderly (60+) population. In brief, the long term impact of decline in fertility and reduction in the size of family will lead to a decrease in the population of children (0-14 years), which in turn will push up the population in the working age group.

Depending on the decline in fertility and mortality rates and the increase in the expectation of life, this will lead to an increasing proportion

of the elderly after a time lag. A greying of the population is inevitable and one must understand its implications. Paul Wallace<sup>1</sup>, a popular writer, dramatically describes this phenomenon as 'agequake'. If we understand the implications of ageing, agequake will not descend on us unexpectedly like an earthquake with death and destruction all around. Instead, we will be prepared to face a world converging on the elderly.

In his recent book, *Understanding Greying People of India*, Arun P. Bali<sup>2</sup> has put together a set of papers

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1. Paul Wallace, *Agequake: Riding the Demographic Rollercoaster Shaking Business, Finance and Our World*, Nicholas Brealey Publishing, London, 1999.

2. Arun P. Bali (ed), *Understanding Greying People of India*, Inter-India Publications, New Delhi, 1999, pp 14-15.

commissioned by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR). He rightly points out that the elderly are more vulnerable than younger persons to social and economic hardships because, 'in the process of development, poor sections lose ground in relative and perhaps also in absolute terms.' This may mean that apart from an increase in the elderly population, the population of the elderly poor will increase.

A comparative account of the elderly in India is presented by S. Irudaya Rajan and his colleagues<sup>3</sup> in another recent publication, *India's Elderly: Burden or Challenge?* They point out that while the increasing numbers of the elderly is attributed to demographic transition, 'their deteriorating condition is considered as the end result of the fast eroding traditional family system in the wake of rapid modernisation and urbanisation.'

**G**iven the size and striking diversity of India, it will be hazardous to generalise on the impact of urbanisation and 'modernisation' on the elderly. In a recent survey of the elderly in a middle class locality of New Delhi (1997), we found that rapid urbanisation and the consequent increase in housing shortage tends to perpetuate the joint family system.

This is because most young married sons do not have the capacity to move out and pay exorbitant house rents. The result is a perpetuation of two and three-generation families staying together, creating perpetual tension between the generations, often leading to serious mother-in-law and daughter-in-law conflicts.

In order to understand the social, psychological, economic and other

implications of an ageing population, one cannot rely only on Census data or for that matter, only on the demographic perspective. Specialised studies and in-depth interviews of the elderly would provide better insights than a statistical approach. Nevertheless, one does need a statistical account of the elderly for policy making, planning and specific programmes to help the elderly through governmental as well as non governmental efforts. The object of this paper is to give some highlights of the emerging demographic scenarios based on the latest data generated by the Census of India, NSSO and relevant United Nations publications.<sup>4</sup>

**I**n 1991, when the last decennial Census was undertaken, the population of the elderly (60+) in India (excluding Jammu and Kashmir where no Census could be undertaken because of disturbed conditions) was 57 million compared to 20 million in 1951 (when the first Census after Independence was conducted).

\* According to the official projections of the Registrar General, India, in 2001 the elderly population is estimated at 71 million, and 114 million by the year 2016 (the year for which the ultimate projections were made).

\* The United Nations projections (medium variant) put the estimated number of elderly in India in 2000 at 77 million. The projection for the year 2025 is 168 million and for

2050 it is 326 million. These are frightening numbers: an elderly population of 20 million in 1951 increasing to 326 million in 2050.

\* If we look at the proportion of the elderly to the total population from absolute numbers, we find that in 1951 it was 5.4% of the total population while in 1991 it was 6.7%. According to the Registrar General's projections, the figure will be 8.9% in 2016.

\* According to the United Nations projections, in 2000, the elderly will account for 7.6% of India's population. By 2025 the comparable figure will be 12.7% and by 2050 it will be 21.3%.

\* It should be noted that the proportion of 60+ female population is invariably higher than that of the male population. According to the UN projections, in the year 2000 the 60+ male population will constitute 7.1% of the total male population, while the comparable figure for 60+ females is 8.2%. By the year 2025, the male and female proportions will be 11.9% and 13.4% respectively, and by the year 2050, the comparable figures will be 20.2% for males and 22.4% for females. This is because of the higher life expectancy of females compared to that of males.

\* According to UN estimates, during the period 1995-2000 in India, the life expectancy of males stood at 62.3 years while that of females was 62.9 years. For the period 2020-25, the figures are 68.8 years for males and 72.1 years for females. For the period 2045-50 the estimates are 73 years for males and 76.9 years for females. It may also be noted that over the decades, the gap between male and female life expectancy is estimated to increase. In this situation at least, the gender gap affects the males adversely.

\* The ageing of population consequent on the change in the age structure will be evident from the fact that all through the last four decades, the

4. For detailed statistical data, see Ashish Bose and Mala Kapur Shankardass, *Growing Old in India: Voices Reveal, Statistics Speak*, B. R. Publishing Corporation, 2000 (in press). See also Census of India, 1991, *Ageing Population of India*, Registrar General, India, 1991; Census of India, 1991, *Population Projections for India and States, 1996-2016*, Registrar General, India, 1996, National Sample Survey, *The Aged in India: A Socio-Economic Profile*, 52nd Round, 1995-96, Department of Statistics, Government of India, Calcutta, 1998.

3. S. Irudaya Rajan, U.S. Mishra, P. Sankara Sarma, *India's Elderly: Burden or Challenge?* Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1999, p. 20



growth rate of the 60+ population has been consistently higher than that of the total population. During 1951-61, the decadal growth rate of the 60+ population in India was 26% compared to the growth rate of 21.6% for the total population. During the decade 1981-91, the comparable figures were 31.3% and 23.9%. The same story is repeated when we consider the male and female population separately.

Looking at regional variations we find that in 1991, three states in India, namely Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Bihar had more than 5 million persons in the 60+ category. It may be noted that in most of the states the population of 60+ males exceeded that of 60+ females, notably in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. But in Kerala, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Gujarat, the 60+ female population exceeded the 60+ male population.

Kerala had the highest proportion (8.8%) of 60+ population in 1991, followed by Himachal Pradesh (8.1%), Punjab (7.8%), Haryana (7.7%) and Tamil Nadu (7.5%). Among major states, the lowest proportion was in Assam (5.3%) followed by West Bengal (6.1%), Bihar (6.3%), Rajasthan (6.3%), Gujarat (6.4%), Madhya Pradesh (6.6%), Andhra Pradesh (6.8%) and Uttar Pradesh (6.9%).

**A**ccording to the 1991 Census, there were 22.2 million elderly (60+) workers in India: 17.8 million males and 4.4 million females. This implies that 39.1% of the total 60+ population were workers. The male workforce participation rate was 60.5% while it was 16.1% for females.

There were more than a million elderly workers in each of the following states: U.P. (4.3 million), Bihar

(2.3), Maharashtra (2.2), M.P. (2.0), Andhra Pradesh (1.9), Tamil Nadu (1.7), West Bengal (1.3), Karnataka (1.2) and Rajasthan (1.0). The elderly workforce participation rates for these nine states are as follows: U.P. (45%), Bihar (42.4), Maharashtra (39), M.P. (46.1), Andhra Pradesh (43.4), Tamil Nadu (39.9), West Bengal (30.8), Karnataka (37.3) and Rajasthan (36.4). Andhra Pradesh has the highest female workforce participation rate (24.2%) among the elderly and West Bengal, the lowest (6.5%).

**T**he distribution of the elderly workforce in nine industrial categories adopted by the Census is as follows: (i) Cultivators 55.9%, (ii) agricultural labourers 22.4, (iii) livestock, forestry etc. 1.6, (iv) mining and quarrying 0.2, (va) manufacturing etc. in household industry 2.4, (vb) manufacturing etc. in other than household industry 3.9, (vi) construction 1.0, (vii) trade and commerce 6.6, (viii) transport etc. 0.9, (ix) other services 5. It will be seen that over 78% of the elderly work force is engaged in agricultural activities. In the case of female workers, the figure is over 84%.

In the absence of any social security in the agricultural sector, the elderly fare badly and this is more true of the female workers. Even in the non-agricultural sectors, there is some social security only in the small organised sector. The problem is most acute in the informal or unorganised sector.

The National Sample Survey (52nd Round, 1995-96) collected data on the economic dependence of the elderly. The all India picture is as follows: Among the elderly rural males, 48.5% claimed that they were not dependent on others, 18% were partially dependent and 31.3% were fully dependent on others. In the case of elderly rural females, 70.6% were fully dependent on others, 14.6% were

partially dependent and only 12.1% said that they were not dependent on others.

**T**he urban scene was as follows: 51.5% of the elderly males claimed that they were not dependent on others, 29.7% were fully dependent and 16.9% were partially dependent. In the case of urban females, 75.7% were fully dependent on others, 11% were partially dependent and 11.5% were not dependent on others. In West Bengal, over 88% of the rural females and 85% of the urban females were fully dependent on others. These figures are the highest among all states.

In Kerala, which has the highest proportion of elderly in India and has several social security schemes, 73.6% of the rural females and 76% of the urban females are fully dependent on others. This shows how vulnerable elderly women are even in Kerala, known for its high order of social investment. The economic dependency ratio among females is the lowest in the rural areas of Himachal Pradesh where 48.7% of the females are fully dependent on others. Himachal has the highest ratio of economic independence (23.6%) among females in rural areas. A remarkable aspect about Himachali women is little appreciated: Because of the massive migration of men from the rural areas to the cities all over India, the women are left to fend for themselves, look after the children and the elderly as well as cattle and whatever land they possess.

The NSS statistics reveal that even the elderly females in the rural areas of Himachal Pradesh have to fend for themselves and not depend on others. The rural Himachali women have no alternative but to 'empower' themselves.

The NSS data provides details about the category of persons who

support the economically dependent elderly – children, grandchildren, spouse and others. In India as a whole, children support 73.2% of the rural males and 76.5% of the urban males and grandchildren support 4.8% of the rural males and 5.2% of the urban males. In the case of elderly females, children support 69.9% of the rural females and 67.9% of the urban females. The share of grandchildren is 5.2% and 5.5% respectively.

**I**n brief, over 75% of the economically dependent elderly are supported by their children and grandchildren. This does indicate the almost total reliance on the family in the case of the elderly who are not economically independent. The figures for Kerala are telling: 83.2% of the rural elderly males who are economically dependent are supported by the children. In the case of urban elderly males, the figure is almost the same: 83.7%. In the case of females, the comparable figure is 72% both in rural and urban areas. The solidarity of the family sustains the elderly. But is this solidarity cracking up? Neither the Census nor the NSS can provide any data on the perception of the elderly. For this, one has to look to in-depth case studies and surveys of the elderly.

We shall present some highlights of a survey which we conducted in a middle class locality in New Delhi (1997).<sup>5</sup> While one cannot generalise from such a small study, it does give a glimpse of what is in store for the elderly in India. Our survey revealed that 97.4% of the elderly think the joint family system is breaking down and 93.1% think the generation gap is widening in India and respect for the elderly is dying out. When asked

about the role of family support in the future, 93% said that the family support system will decline and the elderly persons must learn to be self-reliant.

Over 81% of the elderly confessed to facing increasing stress and psychological problems in modern society, while 77.6% said that the mother-in-law daughter-in-law conflict was on the increase. When probe questions were asked, 62.9% of the elderly felt that the role of grandchildren will decrease in future while 82.8% said that the role of television will increase in future. Over 87% of the elderly stated that the government was not doing enough to take care of the elderly in India and about 38% supported the right to die (euthanasia) movement.

It must be noted again that our sample was confined to a middle class urban locality. Things would be much worse in poor localities as also in rural areas. Nevertheless, we do get an idea of the perception of the elderly which is not likely to differ substantially in rural and urban areas. As we have observed earlier, the extent of dependence on children is more or less the same in rural and urban areas. In short, it would be unrealistic to assume that in the years to come the government will step in to really take care of the elderly. Hope still lies in the solidarity of the family.

**U**ndoubtedly, elderly widows are among the most vulnerable sections of India's population. We have conducted a detailed analysis of marital status in each state of India covering every individual district (based on unpublished 1991 Census data obtained from the Registrar General). Some highlights are presented below: Of the total 60+ males in India, 3.5% are 'never married', 80.7% married, 15.5% were widowers and 0.3%

divorced or separated. In the case of 60+ females, 1.4% 'never married' 44.2% married, 54% were widow and 0.4% divorced or separated.

**A**mong the major states, West Bengal had the highest proportion of widows (65.1%) followed by Karnataka (63.2%), Andhra Pradesh (63.1%), Tamil Nadu (60.3%) and Orissa (60.2%). Overall, Pondicherry had the highest proportion of widows (67.7%). On the other hand, states with a low proportion of widows are Nagaland (24.5), Sikkim (32.1), Haryana (36.5), Mizoram (38.7) and Punjab (39.5). These figures are affected by a range of demographic, economic, health and socio-cultural factors.

If we break down the 60+ age group into 3 sub-groups we find that the percentage of widows is 46.3 in the 60-69 years, followed by 66.1 in the 70-79 age group and 69.8 in the age group 80+. The highest proportion of 80+ widows was in Himachal Pradesh (80.9%).

The total number of 60+ widows in India in 1991 was 14.8 million while the number of widowers was 4.5 million. Let us look at the absolute number of 60+ widows in some of the major states of India: Uttar Pradesh (1.8 million), Maharashtra (1.6), Andhra Pradesh (1.4), West Bengal (1.3), Tamil Nadu (1.2), Madhya Pradesh (1.2), Bihar (1.1) Karnataka (1.0).

Our district-wise analysis shows a high incidence of widows among the elderly females in West Bengal. In Bankura district, 72.4% of the 60+ women are widows. In Mayurbhanj district of Orissa, 66.7% of the elderly women are widows. In contrast, in Tuensang district of Nagaland, only 19.7% of the elderly women are widows. Without in-depth surveys and studies, it is difficult to comment on

38 5 Ashish Bose, *The Condition of the Elderly in India: A Study in Methodology and Highlights of a Pilot Survey in Delhi, 1997* (UNFPA Project Report, Mimeo, to be published).

this striking diversity in the incidence of widowhood. This should merit high priority in social science research. Our sociologists and experts in gender issues must apply their minds to this problem.

**T**o get an idea of our greying world in the decades to come, let us look at the proportion of children (below 15 years) and elderly persons (60+) in the world as a whole. According to United Nations<sup>6</sup> estimates and projections up to 2150, in 1995, children accounted for 31.3% of the world's population while the elderly claimed 9.5% of the world's population. These proportions will almost equal up by 2050 when the children's share will be 20.5% and that of the elderly 20.7%. By the year 2100, the elderly will shoot ahead and claim 27.7% of the population, compared to 18.3% for children. And by the year 2150, the proportion of children will dwindle to 17.5% while that of the elderly will be an all time high at 30.5%. In short, in the decades to come, there will be more elderly persons than children in our world.

A greying of the population is a long term and inevitable consequence of the sharp reduction in fertility levels. Since this reduction first took place in the developed countries, these are precisely the countries which are the front-runners of the greying revolution. The United Nations includes Europe, Northern America and Oceania in Group I countries while Africa, Latin America, China, India and other Asian countries (excluding Japan) are included in Group II countries. The contrasts are striking

between these two groups. In Group I, the old take over the young by the year 2000 when 18.9% are 60+ and 18.8% are below 25. In Group II countries, the old are 8% and the young 32.3% in 2000 but by the year 2075, the old will be 24.2% and the young 19.1%.

So in our countries the focus must be on the young, though the elderly merit increasing attention from planners and policy makers. Nevertheless, in the world as a whole, there is need for a change in vision. Caring for the old is not merely looking into their special needs of health care, housing and financial insecurity but a whole lot of complex issues have to be addressed. The empty nest syndrome reflected in small families, the conflict of generations, a loss of respect for the aged, the flaws of heartless institutional care of the elderly in old people's homes are only some of the issues which defy easy solution. Can spirituality come to the rescue of the old? Can modern science prolong healthy life to 120 years?

**I**n one of his humorous poems, Rabindranath Tagore (1893)<sup>7</sup> suggested that the young and not the old should retire to the forest for they can appreciate what the forest offers: 'Like profuse blossoms, cooing of the cuckoo, moonlight peering through flowery boughs; young couples have no privacy at home, people come and go, bores show no sign of leaving, neighbours peep and eavesdrop – let the old stay at home, manage property, fight lawsuits, keep track of money, and let young couples move to the forest so that they can have all the time to themselves.'

6. United Nations, *Population Division, World Population Prospects: 1998 Revision*, New York, 1999. Vol I. Comprehensive Tables; Vol II. Sex and Age, United Nations, *World Population Projections to 2150*, New York, 1998.

7 Rabindranath Tagore 'Shashtra' in *Kshanika*, 1893. Quoted by Asim Kumar Datta in *Understanding Greying People of India* (edited by Arun P. Bali), New Delhi, 1999.

# Health issues

P C JOSHI and S N SENGUPTA

AT a recent meeting with a senior citizens' forum in Delhi, we raised the possibility of initiating a long-term medical study on the elderly. 'So you want to treat us as guinea pigs,' was the first query regarding our motive. The discussion then turned to the general issues of the elderly – from old age pensions and railway concessions, to health-related advancements and genetic factors in dementia. Clearly, the group was highly aware and keenly debated not just the latest media stories but the current scenario of the aged.

The elderly in India, especially the urban, have long been active advocates of a policy on ageing. They see the issue as concerning not only the social welfare department but the planning commission, since every department of the government is now involved with the special needs and requirements of the elderly.

The impetus to contemporary elderly concerns in India can be traced to three main developments. The first is the evolution of civil society and a

mature democracy resulting in an expanding social commitment of the state. Beginning with the scheduled castes and tribes, the state has gradually accepted its legitimate responsibility to care for the disabled, destitute, mentally deranged and the elderly. This expansion has kept pace with the evolving image of these sections in broader society itself.

The second factor relates to the demographic transition in the country. From 12 million in 1901 the number of the old rose to 57 millions in 1990 and is expected to cross the 100 million mark in 2013. Not only has the absolute number of the elderly increased, their proportion in the population too has risen. From a mere 5.1% in 1901, the elderly will become 21% of the population by the year 2050, estimates a United Nations projection.

The third factor is related to the growth of activism and advocacy spearheaded by groups of the elderly, non-government organizations and academicians. As a consequence, a

national policy for older persons has finally been formulated, enshrining the state's commitment towards its ageing population.

In our presentation the elderly population will be taken to mean people aged 65 and above. Although this definition is somewhat arbitrary, this criteria is used by many countries to decide eligibility for purposes of recruitment and rehabilitation in other societal programmes.

**P**opulation ageing in developed countries is a reflection of a decline in both mortality and fertility. In some developed countries, 15% or more of the population is already 65 and older while 3.4% are aged 80 or older.<sup>1</sup> Although the percentage of the elderly in the population in developing countries is substantially lower than in developed countries, the absolute numbers of old people worldwide are considerable. For example, in India where only 3.4% are 65 and above, they still number 30 million. In 1988, there were an estimated 159 million persons aged 65 and older in developing countries compared to 140 million in developed countries and over 60% of the monthly global net increase in older persons was in the developing countries.

Between 1990 to 2025, the percentage of the population aged 65 and older is expected to increase to just over 20% in Europe and North America and to double from 5 to 10% in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean.

The above projections indicate that by the year 2020, there will be 470 million people aged 65 and older in developing countries, more than dou-

Projected Total Population and Elderly Population, 1990-2020 (in million: projections are medium variant)									
Region	1990			2000			2020		
	Total	≥65	≥80	Total	≥65	≥80	Total	≥65	≥80
World	5296.3	327.6	52.9	6229.3	424.4	67.5	8049.9	705.7	123.9
Developed Countries	1211.1	145.5	31.3	1278.0	172.6	35.5	1387.2	232.8	54.4
Developing Countries	4084.2	182.1	21.6	4590.3	251.8	32.0	6662.7	472.9	69.0

ble the number in developed countries. Three of the four countries projected to have the largest number of old people in the year 2025 are China, India and Indonesia.<sup>2</sup> The growth projected for older population in developing countries has considerable implications for health and social policies. The old population itself is getting older with people over 80 years of age forming the fastest growing subgroup of the population in many countries. Developing countries too are likely to experience a modest increase in the proportion of the population in the oldest age range.

In most developed countries, there are about 65 men for every 100 women in the age group of 65 and above. Generally in developing countries, especially India, there are more old men than old women. The sex ratio will probably fall in many developing countries with female life expectancy projected to increase faster than male life expectancy. In most developing countries, more than 50% of women aged 65 years and older are widowed and in some countries more than 75% of the women aged 75 and older are widowed. In contrast, there is no country in which more than 40% of men aged 75 and older are single.

Marital status has the greatest impact on living arrangements of the

elderly population. In developing countries, the proportion of persons aged 65 and above who live alone ranges from 10% (Japan) to 90% (Sweden). This proportion is smaller in developing countries where there is a tradition of multi-generation households and both married and widowed older persons commonly live with their children and grandchildren.

The past century saw a remarkable improvement in life expectancy although tremendous disparities exist between developed and developing countries. Life expectancy at birth in most developed countries is 70-75 years for men and 76-81 years for women; it is 11 years less in developing countries. In the past few decades, there has also been a substantial reduction in mortality among older persons resulting in an increase in life expectancy at age 65.

A nationwide survey conducted by the National Sample Survey Organization,<sup>3</sup> reported that 45% of the elderly suffered chronic illnesses. Nearly 70% in the urban and 34% in the rural areas were economically dependent. The percentage of the elderly living alone was 6 and 8% respectively for the urban and rural areas. This proportion is, however, expected to increase in the coming years, necessitating appropriate measures for the rehabilitation of the elderly. These socio-demographic factors not only influ-

1. K. Kinsella and C.M. Tacubar, *An Aging World II*, US Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., 1992. Also, UNDP, *Human Development Report 1990*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1990

2. J.S. Siegel and S.L. Hoover, 'Demographic Aspects of the Health of the Elderly to the Year 2000 and Beyond', *World Health Statistical Quarterly* 35, 1982, pp. 132-202.

3. NSSO, 'Socio-economic Profile of Aged Persons', *Sarvekshana* 15(1-2), 1991

ence the extent and severity of morbidity among the elderly but also their quality of life.

In a developing country like India, the elderly people suffer from the dual medical problems of both communicable as well as degenerative disease. This is further compounded by impairments of special sensory functions like vision and hearing. The elderly are highly vulnerable to infectious diseases because of a decline in their immune functions and atrophic changes in various organs. The physiological changes in the old age lead to impaired cough reflex, impaired circulation and tissue perfusion. There is deficient collagen synthesis and poor wound healing. Further, incidence of infection remains high because of poor nutrition and high intake of immunosuppressive drugs.

**A**mong infectious diseases, pneumonia is 50 times more common in the elderly than in adolescents and it accounts for half the deaths caused due to respiratory diseases, excluding cancer. Urinary tract infections are particularly common in the elderly. Asymptomatic bacteriuria affects 30% of elderly women and 7% of elderly men. The common cause of urinary tract infection in the elderly is insertion of catheter and other instruments.

The prevalence of TB is higher among the elderly than younger individuals. A study of 100 elderly people in Himachal Pradesh,<sup>4</sup> found that most of the patients came from a rural background. They were also smokers and alcoholics. Endocarditis thus is a major factor in elderly mortality, accounting for 50% of the cases.

Besides these common infections, the elderly are also susceptible to gastrointestinal infections, pressure sores, septic arthritis, septicaemia and meningitis. The susceptibility of the elderly to these infections along with factors such as poverty, lack of proper nutrition and absence of comprehensive health care calls for special immunization programmes.

**T**he chronic illnesses in the elderly usually include hypertension, coronary heart disease and diabetes mellitus. The prevalence of hypertension was found to be higher in females, affecting as many as 323 per 1000 females in the rural areas.<sup>5</sup> Coronary heart disease was found to be more common in urban areas, and higher for males than females. Given dietary changes and lifestyle factors, such diseases will show an increase in the coming years, thereby requiring special health, nutrition and lifestyle counselling. Diabetes mellitus, which affected 5 million elderly in 1996, is also higher in urban than rural areas.

To check for malignancy, population based cancer registries were initiated to estimate the incidence of cancer under the National Cancer Registry Programme of ICMR in Mumbai, Chennai and Bangalore in 1982 and in Delhi and Bhopal in 1987. The incidence of cancer was higher in both elderly males and females as compared to the total population. In 1996, the total number of elderly persons with cancer was around 0.35 million. Cancer prostrate is the commonest malignancy in males. The chance for contracting this disease among males over 50 years is 30% and mortality is 25%.

5 R. Kutty, S. Radhakrishna, K. Ramachandran and N. Gopinath, 'Prevalence of Coronary Heart Disease in the Rural Population of Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala', *India International Journal of Cardiology* 39, 1993, pp. 59-70

The WHO defines stroke or cardiovascular disease (CVD) as the rapidly developing clinical sign of focal or global disturbance of cerebral functions with symptoms lasting 24 hours or more or leading to death. The crude prevalence rate computed from different community surveys is about 200/100,000 persons. Hypertension, tobacco use, obesity and diabetes mellitus are important risk factors for stroke. Stroke victims impose enormous economic burden on our meagre health care resources.

Cataract is the most common cause of blindness among the elderly in India. Nearly 1.5% are blind, a majority of them in the rural areas. Alongside physical disability blindness also impinges on the mental, social and financial status of the individuals and their families. The WHO-NCPB survey estimated that 12 million Indians were blind and in need of eye care services in 1989.<sup>6</sup>

**A** study on the health care for the rural aged in Madurai district, Tamil Nadu,<sup>7</sup> reported that of the 1910 elderly screened, 88% had visual complaints, 40% had locomotion difficulties, followed by symptoms of central nervous system (14%), cardiovascular (17%), respiration (16%), dermatological (13%), gastrointestinal (10%), psychiatric (4%) and acoustic (8%). 2% of those sampled suffered from neoplasm. A study of the knowledge, attitude and practices<sup>8</sup> regarding nutrition among the

6 M. Mohan, 'Survey of Blindness in India (1986-89)', in *Present Status of National Programme of Control of Blindness*, Directorate of Health Services, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, New Delhi, 1992, pp. 80-100.

7 A. Venkoba Rao, *Health Care of Rural Aged*, Indian Council of Medical Research, New Delhi, 1990

8 M. Srivastava, U. Kapil, V. Kumar, A. B. Dey, K. M. Nagarkar and G. Sekaran, 'Knowledge, Attitude and Practices Regarding

elderly, observed that fruits, leafy green vegetables and milk were rarely consumed in adequate amounts in a general belief that such expensive foods should be given to younger people. No wonder most of our elderly population reports nutritional problems.

According to Government of India statistics,<sup>9</sup> cardiovascular disorders account for one-third of elderly mortality. Respiratory disorders cause 10% mortality while infections and tuberculosis account for another 10%. Neoplasm accounts for 6% and accidents, poisoning and violence constitute less than 4% of elderly mortality with similar rates for nutritional, metabolic, gastrointestinal and genitourinary infections.

**E**lderly individuals usually face a higher risk of developing mental as well as physical morbidity. Their vulnerability to mental problems is due to ageing of the brain, physical problems, socio-economic factors, cerebral pathology, emotional attitude and family structure. The biochemical and morphological changes in the ageing brain of normal individuals are similar to those suffering from dementia. In most cases, mental illnesses co-exist alongside physical problems in the elderly persons. Chronic physical disorders and sensory impairments (vision and hearing defects) are known to be especially associated with mental problems of the elderly.

The incidence of mental illness is strongly influenced by socio eco-

nomie factors like educational levels, degree of economic support, whether living alone, and so on. The presence of dissatisfaction with life and feelings of loneliness and self-pity show a high correlation with mental problems. So does the family structure and situational factors such as a widowed status and fall in income. All these significantly contribute to emotional problems in old age.

**T**he magnitude of mental morbidity in the Indian situation is a serious cause of concern. In India, nearly 4 million elderly persons (age 60 and above) are mentally ill, which, although lower than in western countries, requires to be taken seriously as the necessary psychiatric services fall woefully short of our requirements. Two-third of mental morbidity is affective disorders especially depression and late onset of psychosis, while one-third is dementia.

According to one estimate,<sup>10</sup> the prevalence of depression ranged between 13 and 22% among the elderly and it was most often associated with cerebral pathology. Many of the elderly suffer from higher mental function disturbances like memory problems. Another common problem reported in a major hospital study<sup>11</sup> was mania, accounting for 16% of the psychiatric diagnosis. Mania was more common in males and often accompanied by organic brain syndrome.

The risk factors for mental morbidity in the ageing population stand comparatively higher than for the general population, estimated at 7 per lakh for the general population as

compared to 12 per lakh for the elderly. The main risk factors are loss of fortune, fall in self-esteem, sense of helplessness, poor education, sub-standard health, social and gender discrimination, financial debt and status as a widowed person.

Anxiety disorders are more common in the elderly population. Generalized anxiety disorders are accompanied by depression. In the category of late onset psychosis, the delusions in late paraphrenia may be persecutory, sexual and hypochondriacal. The hallucinations in the elderly are often multi-modal and associated with sensory impairments.

**T**he psycho-physical problems which the elderly confront due to ageing and associated socio-cultural, nutritional and environmental factors demand that we perceive the health of the elderly within a holistic perspective. The maxim of adding years to life implies that the elderly receive adequate state and social support to live an active and socially productive life. At the minimum we require comprehensive health care directed to the elderly, in particular equipping our PHCs in geriatric care. Equally, it is important to learn from the experience of other countries where too the elderly face enormous problems due to weak social support mechanisms.

Fortunately, our cultural ethos gives a special place to the elderly as wise people and counsellors of society. Both geriatric support and social engineering aimed at improving the competence of the elderly and ensuring their active participation in society should be considered together in evolving any policy on ageing care. The experience and wisdom of old age is a treasure for any society; its gainful utilization would be beneficial for both the elderly as well as the younger generation.

Nutrition in Patients Attending Geriatric Clinic at AIIMS', in V. Kumar (ed), *Ageing. Indian Perspective and Global Scenario*, AIIMS, New Delhi, 1996, pp 407-409.

9. S. Guha Ray, 'Morbidity Related Epidemiological Determinants in Indian Aged - An Overview', in C.R. Ramachandran and B. Shah (eds), *Public Health Implications of Ageing in India*, Indian Council of Medical Research, New Delhi, 1994.

10. A. Venkoba Rao, 'Mental Health and Ageing in India', *Indian Journal of Psychiatry* 23, 1981, pp. 11-20.

11. L. Thomas, *Late Night Thoughts of Listening to Mahler's Ninth Symphony*, Bantam Books, New York, 1984.

# Societal responses

MALA KAPUR SHANKARDASS

INDIA has a rich tradition of philanthropic and voluntary activities for mitigating the sufferings of disadvantaged and marginalized people. The old, particularly the poor, frail, disabled and homeless over the centuries have been beneficiaries of various initiatives, though not adequate, supported by voluntarism and/or state provisions. Indeed, the voluntary sector was the first to respond to the problems of the elderly in India.<sup>1</sup>

Beginning with the enactment of the Societies Registration Act of 1860, 'voluntary organizations' encompassing a wide range of agencies, viz. societies, cooperatives, trusts, and trade unions – have been given a legitimate place in the welfare mechanisms in the country. They are now more popularly referred to as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in order to have some uniformity with regard to international terminology.

While this uniformity makes for convenience, it also creates a false picture of homogeneity, particularly to those persons who are not connected with voluntary action.<sup>2</sup> There is a subtle difference between organized voluntary action and non governmental organization functioning,

which can become critical when trying to match the opportunity structures provided by different organizations to potential workers.

In recent decades, the processes of social change – modernization, urbanization and technological change leading to urban migration, employment of women outside the home, nuclear families – have undermined the traditional patterns of care of the elderly, that is by the family. Given changing value systems and priorities, provisions for the care of older persons have increasingly to be provided by voluntary organizations/NGOs.

A directory of voluntary agencies for the welfare of the aged in India compiled in 1982 by CEWA<sup>3</sup> listed 379 agencies; the number of new ones established each decade showing an increase especially after India attained Independence. Significantly, more than half are located in the southern states and Maharashtra. 13 states and union territories did not have any registered voluntary agency working for older persons. About 86% of the listed agencies are institutions providing services like day care, recreation, counselling, geriatric care (medical and psychiatric care) and financial assistance. Information in the CEWA directory indicates that the number of NGOs per million persons aged 60 plus for the country as a whole is 6.46.

1. Manabendra Mandal, 'The Work of the NGOs for Older Persons', *Research and Development Journal* 5(1), 1998, p. 24

2. K.K. Mukherjee and Sutapa Mukherjee, *Voluntary Organizations. Some Perspectives*, Gandhi Peace Centre, Hyderabad, 1988, p. 4.

3. Care of the Elderly: Directory of Voluntary Agencies for the Welfare of the Aged in India, CEWA, Madras, 1982.



A decade later in 1992, the Handbook of Information published by the Association of Senior Citizens<sup>4</sup> listed 665 organizations in India working in the field of welfare of the aged. The list included old age homes, day care centres, pensioners' associations, institutions providing medical help, institutes devoted to research, and associations of senior citizens.

Most registered voluntary agencies provide institutional care in the form of old age homes, either as free facilities or on a 'pay and stay' basis. Many of these are set up under religious auspices. Old age homes in India are used by the 'needy' elderly to pass their last days either as a last resort when for various reasons the family support system breaks down, or for seeking solace while disengaging from family and social concerns. The quality of care in these homes varies, ranging from the bare minimum of lodging and boarding facilities to provisions for medical services, though at only primary level, recreational pursuits, and social activity.<sup>5</sup>

**A** comprehensive analysis of old age homes in the country is not available though the first old age home in India was set up as far back as the early 18th century. A general understanding of the institutional care facilities available to older persons in the country is provided in a monograph titled, 'Care for Elderly'.<sup>6</sup> The monograph lists 329 institutions involved in care of the elderly, out of which only 4 were under the auspices of the government. 189 of the elderly care centres listed were run by Christians, 12 by Hindus, 2 by

Muslims, and 117 were under secular auspices, with 5 put under the category of 'others'. Of the listed institutions 88% functioned as old age homes while 6% were engaged in providing health care and self-employment opportunities. 6% of voluntary organizations also provided day care facilities.

**A**s of 1989, based on information in the monograph, 15,471 elderly were accommodated in old age homes available in the country. A Directory of Old Age Homes in India<sup>7</sup> published in 1995 referred to 354 institutions. Based on a nationwide survey and responses from 256 old age homes, the Directory indicated that 12,702 elderly persons resided in these establishments, not all of which were registered with the government. Another survey carried out on old age homes in the country by the Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum<sup>8</sup> to which only 186 homes responded indicated that most of the funds for these institutions came through religious organizations, private sources and other types of trusts and caste organizations.

The role of voluntary agencies/NGOs in the care of older persons has become important because central and state government activities and funding for the welfare of the elderly are limited. In fact, the government solicits active participation of the voluntary sector to meet the needs of older persons. The role of the voluntary sector in ensuring welfare to various segments of the population, including the elderly, has been emphasized in the 8th and 9th plan documents. The National Policy on Older

Persons announced in January 1999 by the government talks of promoting and assisting voluntary organizations for providing non-institutional services, construction and maintenance of old age homes, organizing services such as day care, multi-service citizen's centres, reach out services, supply of disability related aids and appliances, short term stay services and friendly home visits by social workers.

It was in 1983-84 that the government for the first time decided to make grants to voluntary organizations for services to the aged. The grants-in-aid-provision is for (i) rendering welfare services to the aged, such as health care, income generation, subsistence training; and (ii) for constructing homes for the aged. Over the years many NGOs have been supported from the budget outlays of the respective state governments. But, with most state governments giving low priority to the welfare of the elderly, and the low social encouragement given to the concept of 'voluntary' care vis-à-vis family care, the provision for grants has not been optimally used by the voluntary sector.

**D**uring the 8th five year plan, welfare measures for the elderly were made more specific and comprehensive. Consequently in November 1992, the Ministry of Welfare initiated a scheme called 'Welfare of the Aged' to encourage voluntary organizations through grant-in-aid assistance to provide old age homes, day care centres, mobile medicare and non institutional services for older persons above the age of 60. The scheme marks the entry of the ageing population as a target group in national planning and recognises the voluntary sector as constituting an important institutional mechanism in providing services complementing the endeavours of the state.

4 Handbook of Information, Association of Senior Citizens, Bombay, 1992

5 Mala Kapur Shankardass, 'Towards the Welfare of the Elderly in India', *Bold: Quarterly Journal of the International Institute on Ageing*, 5(1), United Nations, Malta, August 1995.

6 Care for Elderly, a monograph, Madras Institute of Ageing, 1989.

7. Directory of Old Age Homes in India, Research and Development Division, Help-Age India, 1995.

8. For further details refer to S. Inudaya Rajan, U.S. Mishra and P. Sankara Sarma, *India's Elderly: Burden or Challenge?* Sage Publications, New Delhi 1999.

By 1995, 212 old age homes, 31 mobile medicare units, and a number of day care centres set up by the voluntary sector received assistance from government funds marked for the purpose. However, since the scheme did not specify the services to be provided, no proper monitoring/evaluation was carried out. Consequently we have no worthwhile assessment of the functioning of the scheme.

Though the government has voiced official support for a larger role for NGOs and a number of voluntary organizations are active in the field of ageing in different cities and regions, at the national level the inputs remain limited. Moreover, vast differences exist among NGO approaches, roles and capabilities. Some are part of the government service delivery system, some are small independent service organizations, and others are trying out new approaches.

**A** few NGOs have managed to establish a positive track record and gained support for their development work from international and national donors. Reference can be made here to five voluntary organizations functioning at the national level: Bharat Pensioners' Samaj established in 1960, CARITAS India (1962), Indian Association of Retired Persons (1973), HelpAge India (1978), and Age-Care India (1980).

Bharat Pensioners' Samaj is an all-India federation of pensioners associations headquartered at New Delhi. It functions as a nodal point for pensioners belonging to central and state governments and quasi-governmental organizations. It highlights the difficulties faced by aged pensioners and other senior citizens at various forums and strives to solve the grievances of its members by negotiating with appropriate authorities. It holds periodic seminars and

conferences to focus on the problems of pensioners and other elderly citizens. The Samaj helps the needy pensioners through a benevolent fund created through contributions from its well-to-do pensioner members. All pensioners are eligible to become members of the organization as per the procedure laid down by the Samaj.

CARITAS India, a member of CARITAS International undertakes activities in different states and union territories of India. It is the official national level organization of the Catholic Bishops Conference of India, established for the education and animation of society at all levels. It aims to promote care for the sick, crippled, handicapped, destitute and the aged.

**T**he Indian Association of Retired Persons is funded through membership fees, donations and grants-in-aid from the government and undertakes a variety of programmes for the welfare of retired persons. The association organizes regular talks and discussions with the authorities to project the problems faced by retired persons in society. Headquartered in Bombay, this voluntary body has opened its membership to all retired persons and those above the age of 60 years. It brings out a quarterly bulletin and in recent years has started a project for providing socio-medical and financial help to its members. It has also established a well-equipped library in Bombay.

Age-Care was established as a non-political, non-profit, secular, charitable, educational, cultural, and social welfare society for the care of the aged people. Initiated by its founder secretary, N.L. Kumar, who managed the support of a group of dedicated founder members from various walks of life and with diverse life experiences, it focuses on helping

older persons to lead a healthy and dignified post-retirement life.

The membership to this voluntary body is open to all physically fit persons 21 years of age and above, irrespective of caste, creed or sex. With current membership of 1500 volunteers it enjoys patronage from the government, receiving grants for a number of its programmes and projects. It has also been recognized by the United Nations and is listed in the UN Handbook of Organizations active in the field of Ageing (1988 edition).

Age-Care India started off in 1981 organising free geriatric health check-up camps in Delhi for the urban poor and soon spread its network to provide the much needed health care services to the rural poor and elderly from low income groups around the metropolis. The camps, essentially a preventive measure, had till mid-1999 covered about 56,000 aged people above 50 years of age. The organization has over time opened branches at Jaipur for Rajasthan, Shimla for Himachal Pradesh, Dehra Dun for Uttar Pradesh, Faridabad for Haryana, Calcutta for West Bengal and Bhopal for activities in Madhya Pradesh.

**T**hrough voluntary donations from philanthropists and affluent persons in society, the organization has started a pension scheme providing Rs 100 per month to the economically weak and indigent elderly, particularly from rural areas. The scheme is intended to make a difference to the needy aged people above the age of 65 years. Similarly, a disability relief fund has been created at the Age-Care head office for rendering immediate financial assistance (upto a maximum limit of Rs 500) to the needy elderly during emergencies, accidents and sudden physical disability.

In addition, the organization has set up day care centres, holds regular weekly public lectures on topics of ageing and allied interests, also seminars and conferences, creates awareness about problems of older persons among school and college students, and organises yoga and nature cure training for the elderly. An innovative new project, day centre on wheels, which provides services like medical consultations, BP check-up, spot counselling, and collates information pertaining to available facilities and services for seniors. The organization brings out a monthly publication, *Age-Care News*, for the general reader and celebrates Elders' Day on 18 November every year to honour senior citizens above 80 years as part of its annual day function.

**H**elpAge India is the country's largest voluntary organization with 23 regional offices. Receiving nominal grants from the central government, the organization runs on charity funds collected through motivating students and youth organizations, from private and public sectors, and through selling flags and greeting cards. Its primary focus is to provide financial support to other voluntary agencies engaged in the welfare of the aged. Through its research and development centres, it trains personnel engaged in the care of the aged. It is accredited to the United Nations and is closely associated with Help the Aged, UK. It is also a founder member of HelpAge International.

Over the years, HelpAge India has supported 1,600 projects at a cost of Rs 130 crore.<sup>9</sup> In 1998-1999 alone, it supported 190 projects to the tune of over Rs 13 crore. One of the important initiatives taken by the organization is the mobile medicare unit (MMU) pro-

gramme which enables older people to assume an active role in looking after their own health while encouraging others to do the same. 95 MMUs are at present servicing lakhs of older persons residing in slums, resettlement colonies and adjoining rural areas, providing medicines, counselling and health care free of cost. In 1998-1999 alone, HelpAge India spent over Rs 1 crore on the MMU project.

**B**esides these national level voluntary organizations, a number of regional and local level NGOs have set up multi-service facilities and innovative programmes. Mention can be made here of the Action for Social Help Assistance (ASHA), Family Welfare Agency, Dignity Foundation, Development, Welfare and Research Foundation (DWARF), Meals on Wheels, and so on, all operating in different parts of the country. Their activity relates to providing second careers, income generating activities, companionship, nutritional counselling, cooked meals, help-line services and promoting active ageing. As a result, in recent years age care services have become increasingly available in non-urban areas.

A new strata of old people requiring multifarious affordable facilities are the parents of non resident Indians (NRIs) or inland professionals/businessmen who though financially well-off are unable to personally attend to their parents. A large number of elderly now live alone without their children, and require care, assistance, help and services at their place of residence.

The Agewell Foundation, formally launched on 6 April 1999 at Delhi with support from the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment operates like a club by offering a life membership of Rs 5000 to an individual or an elderly couple. Children,

especially NRIs, can sponsor their parents to the club, which is chiefly concerned with the problems of the privileged elderly otherwise lacking organized help.

The services arranged for the elderly range from legal assistance, financial advice, ambulance service, help with pension problems, property tax notice, wealth/income tax assessment orders, and so on. The Foundation levies a fixed tariff on the subscriber, to be billed every month depending on the frequency of use. It runs an employment exchange for older persons, help line, involves elders as volunteers for social work and provides a platform to interact with other fellow senior citizens. The Agewell Foundation while 'charging costs of professional services, acts as a bridge in helping members access the 'right' sources to alleviate their specific problems.

**D**espite the NGO/voluntary sector coming forward to meet the growing needs of older persons, further steps need to be taken to create mechanisms for the proper and adequate delivery of services. There is an urgent need to expand provisions, strengthen capacities, balance geographical distribution, critically evaluate the functioning of different programmes, involve the community in taking care of the aged, and sensitize and conscientize the populace to the issues of ageing.

Equally, there is need to set up an apex/nodal agency to coordinate and synergize the different activities and programmes, as also network the various actors. Given the increasing costs of service provision, we need to encourage resource sharing and promote voluntarism if we are to adequately respond to the diverse and multiple needs of our growing aged population.

9. HelpAge India, Annual Report 1998-1999.

# Interview

*M.M. Sabharwal is best known for his extraordinary work in the care of the aged. After a distinguished corporate career, he joined HelpAge India, a voluntary charity organization set up by Help the Aged of U.K. in 1980. In his two decade long involvement with these organizations, he has served as Chairman of both HelpAge India and HelpAge International. Currently he is President Emeritus of HelpAge India and continues his active association with the movement of the aged. He was interviewed by Mala K. Shankardass.*

*You joined HelpAge India, a charity organization at a time when you were a successful corporate sector executive. How did you make the move from a business orientation to voluntarism?*

It was not difficult as my heart identified with the cause – to foster welfare especially of the needy aged.

My only hesitation was whether I would be able to devote enough time to a cause which requires dedication and commitment. What prompted me to be part of the team to raise funds for programmes to assist the elderly was a belief in the need to raise awareness about the problems of the elderly in the country and start projects which would assist them irrespective of caste or creed. I do not believe in charity, 'giving fish to eat'; I am for teaching people how to fish. I look upon my involvement with ageing issues as a challenge, setting a new agenda for the welfare of the elderly, particularly those unfortunate poor, disadvantaged and isolated aged, who need help and assistance for integration in society.

*It seems that your personal mission merged with that of the organization. How did you plan and work*

*towards the goal of improving the quality of life of older persons?*

No programmes can be initiated and objectives achieved without funds. Resource mobilization – raising adequate funds for the ever-increasing number of age care programmes each year is of paramount importance. My connections with the corporate world were of some value and helped in building the image of the organization. We started with the school education-cum-fund-raising programme as our major fund-raising effort. Over time, it has become the mainstay of our resource mobilization activity which includes use of video films, audio-visuals, advertisements, sponsored events, and so on.

The involvement of school children in the cause can be judged from the fact that in 1998-1999 just one school – Holy Angels in Chennai – collected as much as Rs 5.04 lakh. Reaching out to people who believe in 'live to give' through students, direct mail appeal, sale of greeting cards, and through approaching corporate houses for donations and sponsorships, we were able to raise Rs 15.90 crore last year.

The funds finance a variety of age-care programmes focusing on enhancing the well-being of elders in society. We work towards ensuring and promoting dignity, empowerment and value of older persons. Over the years we have supported 1,600 projects at the cost of Rs 130 crore, this is of course calculating the costs at current price. We try to be conscious of present day circumstances.

*What do you think is our most urgent problem? Has ageing emerged as an issue?*

People living to older ages is an achievement. But when people live longer and enjoy no social security – have to live below the poverty line, as widows, lonely and ignored by families, community or society – then ageing becomes a problem. In India, we must realize that ageing of the population is taking place at a rapid pace. Today we have about 77 million elderly in the population, by 2025 they will be a whopping 177 million. The problem arises because 90% of older persons are from the unorganized sector which has no social security system for the old; about 80% live in rural areas with inadequate medical facilities; almost 40% are below the poverty line; 60% of 60 plus women are widows, the most disadvantaged in society; 73% of 60 plus are illiterates – the situation is grim for older persons in our society.

I believe that ageing is one of the most crucial issues vying for attention. If there is no intervention

now, the situation will lead to an increase in the numbers of destitute elderly, decrease in per capita income and the quality of life of older persons. The basic problem of older persons in our society is a lack of security at three levels: financial, medical and emotional. We must have programmes to address these issues and plans to overcome these problems.

*You have been involved with ageing issues now for twenty years, what concrete steps have been taken to tackle the problem?*

HelpAge India's work encompasses a broad spectrum – from providing care to older persons, communication and advocacy, development of grassroot organizations and assisting the formation of national strategies, policies and legislation on ageing. We have designed and implemented programmes focusing on improved access to health and eye care services, community based services, income generating activities and training. Over the years the organization has conducted lakhs of cataract operations free. We have started and supported numerous income generating programmes which have helped the elderly to be gainfully occupied, improve the families' economic condition, provide relief from indebtedness, enable elderly to become owners of looms, raise the status of older persons, and so on. Our guiding principle is 'Earn a living, learn a craft.'

Our day care centres provide the elderly opportunities for companionship, recreation, healthcare and nutrition. We have also recently started income generation activities through these centres. For instance the centre at Yamuna Nagar, Haryana runs a *durrie* making project for older women. This project provides them with equipment and material. HelpAge India is supporting almost half the old age homes in the country and these now spell security, care and love for old people.

HelpAge India's Adopt-a-Gran (AAG) programme is widely acclaimed for its concept. It links older people in need with sponsoring families, individuals and corporates. Under this scheme help is provided in the form of food, clothing, medical care, bedding, articles of personal use and pocket money. Last year Rs 8.11 crore was spent on the AAG programme. Besides this, we have started another remarkable programme. HelpAge India has evolved the scheme of micro-credit under which some form of credit or revolving loan is provided to project participants to start income generating activities. Another innovative project is the production of vermi compost

through eco-friendly methods in Rajasthan, which is benefiting more than 100 older persons in the lower income group through each installation.

*It seems that HelpAge India's main activities are fund raising and service projects for the elderly. Should not research be important to understand the situation?*

At HelpAge India we are interested in studying the problems related to age-care and in evolving more effective techniques of training, research and development of facilities in order to optimize the returns and benefits of the funds spent on our programmes. On 4 October 1990, the President of India inaugurated our training, research and development centre in New Delhi. The centre is engaged in both training of personnel engaged in age-care work, and research and development connected with age-care.

We organize training workshops, seminars and visits to well run age-care institutions. These programmes are aimed at increasing the knowledge and skills of all levels of personnel engaged in voluntary organizations working for age-care. Our development activities focus on creating service facilities for elderly citizens in public institutions as well as in institutions in the government sector.

*How is HelpAge India's liaison with the government?*

We work in active association with government departments to further the cause of the elderly. In 1984 we served as the only voluntary organization representing the elderly on the working group appointed by the Planning Commission to prepare recommendations for the seventh five year plan. We are increasingly associated with various committees and groups constituted by the Government of India for the welfare of the elderly persons. We have also received active support from the directorates of education, social welfare and cultural affairs of various state governments and the Union Ministry of Welfare in the implementation of some of our programmes.

*The organization runs projects in different parts of the country, what is its organizational structure?*

We have distinguished national personalities like The President of India and the former President among our patrons. This imposes a great responsibility on us – while it enhances our image, we have to maintain and improve our credibility. The governing body comprises of eminent persons from different walks of life who oversee the affairs of the set up. The director general looks after the overall planning and implementation of

our policies and programmes with the support of functional directorates at the head office. The organization has 24 regional and area offices located throughout the country. Though the functioning of HelpAge remains centralized, since it has expanded its operations to all parts of the country the time has come to initiate a process of decentralization. We plan to have members on the governing body representing the 4 metros of the country and provide greater autonomy to the regions.

*Besides motivating people to donate for ageing concerns, has HelpAge been able to change people's ideas about ageing and related issues?*

The wide acceptance of our Legacy Campaign indicates that people are now willing to think differently. In 1995-96 we launched a campaign to persuade people to think about HelpAge India in their wills. An increasing number of donors have shown their commitment to the cause of the aged by making HelpAge India a beneficiary in their will. I have willed my house to the organization and a number of my friends have also followed suit. There is this new phenomenon – promoting cause related marketing – which means that you buy a product and a small percentage goes to a cause. The Standard Chartered Bank has started a credit card scheme which is linked to HelpAge India; the Godrej companies have also come forward to support us in this endeavour.

*What is the future of HelpAge India and of the voluntary sector in ageing issues?*

HelpAge India has established itself nationally and internationally. We enjoy accreditation with the United Nations, are closely associated with Help the Aged, UK, and are a founder-member of HelpAge International which has a network in 50 countries. My association with both these organizations has helped the cause of the elderly to cross national boundaries. Since our annual income is growing, reaching Rs 20 crore this year, we are able to undertake new projects and expand as well as strengthen the old ones. We are currently helping evolve a plan of action for implementing the national policy on older persons announced by the government in January 1999.

The voluntary sector has a crucial role to play in raising awareness about ageing issues and initiating programmes for the welfare of the aged, particularly since the government has limited resources and requires support in reaching out to the needy section of society to enhance the facilities in existing and new age-care institutions.

# The last scene

MOHAMMAD TALIB

EVERY society marks the biographical trajectory of its members into recognized scenes of a play. Each scene represents different roles and narrations, varying colours and costumes. As individuals graduate from one scene to another, they acquire newer identities and relations in the structure and dynamics of the play.

The imagery of drama is somewhat restrictive if deployed to understand life. While a play has clear cut scenes, actual life has several replays of the same drama enacted simultaneously. The final, the middle and the early scenes of a play coexist in actual life; it is their inter-relation which makes a scene or a group of actors problematic.

The last scene in life has invariably been understood either segmentally or integrally. In a segmental view, old age is set apart, constructed through stereotypes and discriminated against, simply because those enacting the last scene are considered

worn out and removed from the central concerns of active, healthy and productive life.

Old age, viewed integrally, is understood as a repository of age-old wisdom and cumulative experiences. Viewed thus, old age gets metaphorized and embellished with respect and vital resources necessary for productive life. Seen as a single slice of life unconnected to its other phases, old age is often burdened with ageism, construed either as a second childhood or mere oblivion – in the words of Shakespeare ‘Sans teeth, sans taste, sans everything’ (As you like it, act 2, scene 7).

All societies evolve an inter-generational contract – between the generation now retired having lived its productive life, those in the productive segment, and the ones in the pre-productive stage. The intergenerational contract, implicit yet symbolised in cultural narratives, foregrounds interdependence and exchange of life

support provisions in material and symbolic terms. While no society can claim that it follows the contract in its full details, its breach generates ambivalence and is rarely justified in clear terms.

**T**he Puranic story of Shravan Kumar provides one example of a sacred rationale for a mutual sharing of life resources between the post productive and productive members in a family. The story glorifies the relevance of and relation to old age and develops the logic to a point where, in the act of serving the old parents, Shravan Kumar and his wife not just lose their precious material possessions but even their lives. The story, however, resolves the tragic ending by relating the happening to divine will.

Old age thus becomes part of a sacred cosmos which in turn strengthens the intergenerational contract. The story further contrasts Shravan Kumar with his counterpoint Damodar who treats his parents as the burdensome junk of his life. Shravan Kumar carries his parents around in a *kanwar* (a bamboo device shouldered by pilgrims for carrying their belongings) in search of a cure for their blindness by visiting holy places. Damodar, on the other hand, drives his parents out of the house as he perceives them a useless dead weight.

In our society of mega projects and transnational corporations, the ancient intergenerational agreement seems to have broken down in favour of the productive and professional segment of society. Consequently, while the post productive segment slides into crass old age, the pre productive begins to suffer from child abuse. Is it because the rhythms of productive life are so focused and engaged that they neither have the time nor predisposition to look at the scaly margins of collective humanity?

Rarely does the dominant consciousness of the productive segment of society display an ability to step back and examine its basic premises. Ironically, the vantage point for self-reflection comes from its own counterpoint – old age or childhood. Alternatively, productive humanity is forced into introspection in moments of colossal failures. Moments of breakdown offer material to look at constituent parts holistically, integrally and without imposing segments or contending divisions on common humanity. By itself, productive humanity views old age in its own image and suggests remedial measures accordingly. For instance, most studies on old age in India, backed by western perspectives in gerontology, invariably evaluate old people along measures of consumption (life-support systems) or productivity (gainful work).

**M**arket mechanisms often become the cultural matrix in planning remedial actions. But one may relate to old age through resources of life outside the state or the market, and locate the old, not as recipients of societal philanthropy but an authentic section of humanity capable of providing vital inputs to life in the making. In its own life domain, a large chunk of humanity is constantly glossed over or dismissed by the dominant spirit of working people. There is, however, a manner of retrieving or harnessing life expressions and resources dismissed or pushed into oblivion out of sheer haste.

One glimpse of the lost reality of old age can be gathered by stilling the image of an old man bending down to pick up his walking stick. For a moment ignore the intention of the old man in bending down as well as the walking stick. What is left is a movement of the body as if in a cer-

tain sequence of a performing art, displaying grace and elegance. The task of retrieving the charm requires a vantage point located in movement of poise and not haste. While haste is invariably unmindful of its context, poise always depends on the fit with the surroundings. This is also the distinction between the young and the old. Today much of the reality of old age remains under-represented.

**T**he present note turns to selected writings in Urdu fiction to understand the age-old aspect of old age. This literature sensitises us to the need to counter ageism and to examine the biography of the old in their own terms.

Kashmiri Lal Zakir's novel *Doobtey Sooraj Ki Katha*<sup>1</sup> (The tale of the setting sun) pastes a poetic adage at the beginning of the story:

Two fellow travellers, the sun and me/Had reached our station in the evening./Both were travel weary, slept on the earth's mattress/Next morning the sun woke up and left me in my sleep.

The poem captures the breakdown in the intergenerational agreement, paving the way for the creation of humanity left in the lurch. In the preface of the novel *Aao baat karen* (Let's Talk) the author argues that each fragment of life has a beating heart. He uses the metaphor of a mother and child. Though the growing child creates difficulties in communication and relationship, the mother rarely forgoes her responsibility. Even in moments when she cannot attend to the child or even comprehend it, the frame of the relationship is not transgressed.

As the child climbs the stairs of life, the mother gradually steps down the same ladder. While the child grows under the spreading light of day, the

1 Kashmiri Lal Zakir, *Doobtey Sooraj ki Katha*, Novelistan, New Delhi, 1985.



mother's canopy of sunlight slowly recedes. Though they converse with each other, there is a hiatus of several stairs of age between them. Both struggle to understand each other, but with effort and difficulty. And as the ladder of life between them grows, their communication suffers. There comes a point when the son stands on the highest point of the ladder and the mother on its lower terminal end. Communication between them is now near impossible.

**T**he distance makes their voices inaudible to each other. One is in haste and has no time to listen to a long narration. But the mother is reticent. She sees no reason to be in haste because the final stairs disappear into nothingness. She is reminded of the time when her son would cry and even if the cry was incomprehensible she never opted out of the grid of communication. Now, when the mother slips on the stairs, she is overshadowed by a setting sun, and the son is looking elsewhere.

This precariousness of relations between two generations becomes the dominant theme of the novel. The life of Durga Das, the protagonist, is traced from youth to old age. The novel juggles with the dilemma of locating the aged – in the family or in an old people's home. The author opts for the family. Perhaps the novelist's sensitivity grounds the remedy in the expressive resources of the family and not the stark instrumentalities of the market of which the old people's home is one expression.

Can one simply break inter-generational relations? Perhaps not. Joginder Pal's *Maqamat*<sup>2</sup> (Stations) describes Jamal's encounter with various contrasting stations (as gene-

rational points) of his biographical journey. Jamal, in his mother's lap, learns to recite the word of God and wakes up into the world of insight and meaning. But in the next stage, when Jamal's children are growing, his mother is beginning to lose her bearings in life. She is physically and mentally challenged. And when she beats at her locked room in anguish, Jamal chooses to sedate her. Was this the quickest and least expensive remedy? Jamal gets the first clue to his mother's angst when his son, after marriage, pronounced that he wished to lead his life (with wife and children) in his own way, unencumbered by the old parents. Jamal now has the answer: his mother needed him, not the pills. He explains to his son how love for wife and children grows only if it has a wider constituency, that love for one's wife grows alongside love for one's parents. 'Please include Us in your We,' Jamal implores.

But Maqamat's characters encounter a complex principle of inclusion and exclusion among members in a group. Jamal mistakes his wife for his mother. Why this inclusion of his mother after her complete exclusion? Perhaps continuities in primary relationships, when partially blocked, display a reserve and resilience to reappear in multifarious forms independent of the actor's will. These relationships offer material for imagining a more sensitive blueprint for the inclusion of the aged in the community of the young.

**I**ndeed, there could be yet another way. The story *Nannhi ki Naani*<sup>3</sup> (The little one's grandmother) by Ismat Chughtai describes an old woman who in a small town of some zamindari

settlement had served as a maid to the families of the local elite ever since her childhood. Her salary consisted of the day's meals and clothes discarded by the family. She was forced to retire when she couldn't spot a lizard in the *daal* and a fly in the *rotis*. After retirement, she tries to carve out a niche for herself. She becomes a mobile prop in a given cultural setting and plays the role of an information conduit/carrier among families where she was a familiar presence.

**E**conomically she was assetless and entirely dependent on her past patrons. Yet, she overcame her marginality by seeking membership in a common cultural universe. She is let in and accommodated. There was an ethos wherein she was assigned a position. For instance, everyone knew that she pilfered household articles, or demanded hospitality when the choicest food was cooked in limited quantity for special guests. She would entertain, embarrass, criticize, help – somehow succeeding in over-coming her marginality. There were sufficient fragments of both culture and relationships to which she had access. The story evokes the élan of a civilizational principle which binds the engaged and the retired without gratuity or regular financial support.

But Nanhi ki Naani ends tragically, thereby revealing the fragility of cultural resolution. A similar theme in a different setting is charted out in Hajra Kumar's *Mohabbat, Kitab Aur Tokrey*<sup>4</sup> (Love, books and baskets), the story of Master Shanker Das Nigam whose ageing happens coterminously with several other events in a small town. Master Nigam was fiercely fond of his rare books in Urdu and Persian, a passion not shared by his wife or anyone else.

2. Joginder Pal, 'Maqamat', *Naya Daur*, September 1996, pp 27-30

3. Ismat Chughtai, 'Nannhi ki Naani', in Asif Nawaz Choudhary (ed), *Ismat Chughtai ke Sau Afsaney*, Maktaba-e-Shero-o-Adab Lahore, n.d., pp 1294-1308

4. Hajra Kumar, 'Mohabbat, kitab aur tokrey', *Biswin Sadi*, April 1996, pp 51-55

He had not even deposited emotions in the family bank. As the country was partitioned and zamindari abolished, Master Nigam's sons grew into marriageable age. Meanwhile, his wife dies and he gets further confined to his idiosyncratic past. The memory of a platonic love is not enough to alter the solitariness of his life. Subsequently, when the sons get married, Master is further estranged from his family.

**M**aster's esoteric engagements irked everyone in the family. At least in the past his wife would dry his damp books and the pickles under the sun in a common stroke. But with the passage of time, both Master Nigam as well as his chosen collection of books lose even their notional significance. Once when he is away for a long period his room is thoroughly cleaned and decked up for Diwali. The termite-eaten books and the wooden frame of the almirah are washed away. The 'worn out' books, Master Nigam's simulacra, are, however, rejuvenated in a curious manner. Mixed with water and clay, the old books are converted into a soft paper mash to make baskets for storing onions and potatoes. Master Nigam can't come to terms with the cataclysmic changes and passes away. On the 13th day after his death, 13 Brahmins are fed with the customary delectable eatables stored in the paper-mache baskets.

Is utility and productivity the only reference point for declaring an object or a habit obsolescent? Who is to judge? Who is labelled? How do the labelled respond? Perhaps piecemeal policy offers a restricted answer. For inviting a long term civilisational response to the query, one would draw attention to Joginder Pal's *Dadiyan*<sup>5</sup> (Grandmothers) in which the prota-

gonist refuses to vacate her ancestral home to shift to a government quarter allocated to her grandson. When her grandson suggests that he would let out the parental house on rent, Dadi disagrees with him. She tells him that she will not leave the house alone, that if it is to be rented out, she too should be included in it. To give a further punch to her views she says, 'If the old are of no use, rent them out.'

What was so special about the house which Dadi was defending so fondly? It had nine little rooms, three of them without a roof. The other rooms were in no better shape. But when Dadi opted to stay back, she wasn't left alone. She found herself waiting for her own self as she moved from one room to the other. In one room Dadi found herself cutting vegetables, in the kitchen blowing the fire, in yet another resting on the bed, expressing concern.

**T**he various dadis formed a moral community deposited in a robust and animated fashion in the seemingly dilapidated ancestral home. Not only did Dadi's ego lend itself to a plurality of alters, she even found herself merging into the inmates of the local environment. The larger kinship starting from Dadi included *koel*, a frequent visitor, which she named Kesri and a host of house sparrows who had built their nests in the house. Another long term resident who formed part of Dadi's practical kin was a king cobra. She had fed him a bowl of milk every evening from the time she became a member of the house after marriage. Dadi was Kesri as also the mango flower which she picked at onset of summer.

The mindscape and the landscape were part of a common being. Dadi, along with an entire milieu grew, matured and experienced ageing in a common frame. Dadi's house was

slowly frittering away and so was she. When she died, the first of her kin to spread the news was the dog who visited Dadi every evening for his meal.

Joginder Pal's *Dadiyan* helps us to understand the nuances of displacement in society. Is compensation ever possible for a life lost? How can one provide a substitute for the house in which Dadi had spent her entire life? What about the villages and tribal lands which our policy makers cognize as just a simple piece of land? How can there be a simple substitute for a life whose complexity is unfathomable to an outsider? One reason why solutions to the problem of ageing cannot be meaningfully located in only making the elderly either good consumers or good producers is because production and consumption do not exhaust all realms and realities of a human being.

**I**n attempting to retrieve the age-old from old age, an integral view helps restore the linkages between post productive and productive segments of society. This view also recreates the centrality of mutualism in collective life. One last clarification about the age-old in old age: Its constituents cannot be seen as mere functional inputs into an inter-generational combine. They incorporate a capacity to offer a critique of the dominant order, of the ways of the productive working segments. This capacity is a repository of ultimate knowledge, though unrecognized by the rule of fashion. It generates another form of knowledge to understand one's relation to the limits of life; also the datedness of prevailing meanings with claims to perennality. In its ability to carry a memory/record of how life was, old age confronts adulthood. It provides a powerful critique to alter the metaphors/the stereotypes which seek to lock old age in a fixed position.

# Omission-commission

WITH time things change. Seasons change, nights change. Twelve miles away speech changes. How much is in the head, has anyone weighed it? One hopes to God that no one loses their head.

In a village waving in the breeze, lived Bania. A sweet grandson was born to him in late age; birth was in *Moola nakshatra* (the first star of the Sagittarius). So both his parents died when he was seven months old. The mother died first, then the father. Who can say what is going to happen? When the only son dies, grief is not ordinary. When Sethani saw her only son's dead body, she wept and wept and died. But Seth considered these events to be the result of his *karma*; he took courageous action.

Clasping his grandson to his breast, he continued to run his business somehow... and no one will know how he did it. Grandfather loved his grandson more than his own life; the child stuck to his lap twenty-four hours a day as though he was part of the same body. When the child would cry, grandfather would do what he could to stop the crying. He would make him drink

milk; when the child insisted, he would walk on his knees. He became a horse to ride on... he would be beaten lightly with a whip. At night he would sleep on the wet side of the bed while the child slept on the dry side... and even in his dreams he did not get repulsed by the child's drool, shit and piss.

As he started learning to walk, the child began asking questions in his lisping way. In the middle of the night he would ask what is this and who says what... and grandfather would answer each question with enthusiasm. He would explain everything... he would be asked once, he would be asked thirty times. He would laugh and answer in sweet and mild tones. He would never make the child wait for an answer, or give another answer. He would not be anxious or angry, but explain with fourfold enthusiasm as though he was the questioner himself. As though each question was a new question. He would relate long forgotten memories to his grandson. What is this – a crow. What is this – *chandamama* (moon). What is this – a peacock. What is this – a tree. What is this – neem.

One day during the monsoon, grandfather was explaining the meaning of loss and gain to his grand-

\* *Bhul-chook lenu-deni* by Vijay Dan Detha and Komal Kothari  
Transcreated from the Marwari original by Mohmaya

son when lightning and thunder struck with great force. The child became frightened and cried, 'Which bad man is fighting with whom?' Grandfather soothed him and replied: 'This bad man is mad, he is constantly fighting with everyone and roaring and glittering for twenty-four hours. But we don't care about him.' He then put cotton balls into the child's ears. After this incident, he would put cotton balls into the child's ears every monsoon.

Once during the rains a frog hopped near the child. He pointed to it, what is this—a frog. What is this—a frog, a frog. On the third repeat, grandfather started to cough... the child continued to ask what is this, what is this, but grandfather could not form the word 'frog' fully. He coughed so hard that he became exhausted... *khal khal, khal khal*... till his guts started to hurt, eyes started to water. But the child's attention was still on the frog. In between coughs, grandfather managed to rasp out 'frog'. In the child's happiness lay his own.

While making bills in his shop, while weighing items, he was asked what is this? What is this? Not once was he miserly with an answer. What is this—ant. What is this—elephant. What is this—lamp. What is this—sun. In the light of the moon, the lamp, the sun, grandfather taught grandson all that he needed to know. Explaining, explaining, Seth became old. Grandson became a youth. He was married with much song and dance. His wife entered the house, *rimjhim rimjhim*.

Grandfather's birth became successful, but his body became old and weak. Teeth dropped out, hair fell out. His neck began to shake and illness began to stalk him. Every nerve became filled with weakness... cough fever pain anxiety... if god would only take me now, then my breath can leave my body. But death does not come soon and one must bear one's sorrows. His eyes became dim, ears could not hear properly.

All through the day and night, grandfather's cough would disturb the sleep of grandson sleeping beside his wife. He would be upset, but hesitated to scold him; he would admonish him many times, but grandfather could not control himself. Until his eyes gave away, he would wipe his spit and phlegm with his own hand... but when he became blind, he could not do this. He would wipe his drool with the end of the turban. Who would wash his clothes, who would bathe him? Grandson and his wife were young, they themselves were blind. They did not care. And then the business-accounts had to be kept and maintained... no one could take time off. Once he heard the sound of the door opening... he called out who is it? Grandson did not like the question and answered sarcastically, 'It is me'.

While leaving he banged the door shut; grandfather asked who is it? Grandson became angry: 'How many times do I have to tell you, it is me! Why don't you understand it once? Why don't you start reciting gods name now... why should anything else concern you?'

Seth hesitated and said: 'Son, slowly slowly all meaning has been erased from my life, but before one dies all relationships cannot be broken off. I have been wanting to say something to you for a long time. If I do not say it now, it will remain forever in my heart.'

Grandson replied with irritation: 'After death, how can anything remain in your heart?'

Grandfather coughed and coughed '...son you do not even have time to listen to me. But I had all the time to give to you. Don't be so angry. You would ask me a question twenty, twenty times, and I would answer you immediately. And now you are upset when I ask you something twice.'

'So should I leave my work just for you', answered son. 'I too would work', said grandfather. 'But more than my business, I looked after you. Now you are big, but when you were a child I would consider your piss of more value than *gangajal*. I did not even dream of being treated like this. Once in the monsoon, frogs came into the water of the courtyard... you asked what is this? While saying the word frog I started coughing, and coughed so much that I thought I would die.'

'What nonsense!' said grandson angrily. 'Is it possible that I did not even know a frog? You have nothing better to do than accuse me falsely.'

Laughing his toothless laugh, grandfather countered: 'False accusations? Would I lie to you? In business the supreme quality is of omission-commission... I now ask you for a favour. You cannot refuse me. When you have children you will understand the true meaning of return-favours.' Grandson was in a hurry, he was not inclined to wasting his time in such talk. 'But I have never taken any favours,' he said. Seth spat out phlegm and replied: 'The mistaken favour was all mine and it is my biggest mistake that I am in your care today. Now I have had enough... while dying I give you my blessings—may you live a thousand years. May there always be children's voices and laughter in your courtyard. And when the time comes, may your children treat you exactly in this way. Like you, may they never acknowledge return-favours. I hope I die now... go play the drum in happiness.'

Seth reached the end of his lonely life. Was his grandson happy? Only he knows that himself... but to keep up appearances he wept loudly and kept weeping long after the ceremony was over.

# Books

**SOCIAL AGING IN A DELHI NEIGHBORHOOD** by John van Willigen and Narender K. Chadha. Bergin and Garvey, Westport, Connecticut and London, 1999.

THERE is no dearth of popular and academic articles and books on social ageing. Most of them are based on impressionistic findings and a few unstructured interviews with haphazardly drawn respondents. Having tended their aged parents and grandparents or some other kin, thereby experiencing the traumas of ageing, many authors claim to have an understanding of the problems and crises of the ageing population.

No doubt, a keen observer can gather important insights from the study of even a single case, and anthropology has a tradition of writing and analysing life history accounts of typical individuals, thus advancing inductive statements. Even general impressions of a phenomenon can be hypothesis-generating but the basic canon of sociological research is to focus on a community, either naturally given or 'constructed' by the researcher, before formulating propositions about the phenomenon.

van Willigen and Chadha, the former an American anthropologist and the latter an Indian psychologist, have in their book which appeared in the International Year of the Aged Peoples, 'constructed' a sampled community of older people. They carried out an intensive study, relying both on qualitative observations and quantitative analysis. Extremely well written, this Indo-American venture is a valuable addition to the literature on social gerontology and anthropology of ageing. It is also a good contribution to urban sociology.

Both van Willigen and Chadha have independently worked on ageing. Earlier in 1995 Chadha completed an ICSSR sponsored project on the problems of older people in Delhi, while van Willigen authored a well-known work on the social organisation of older people in a rural American community in Kentucky, USA in 1989. They met accidentally at the venue of the Indian Science Congress in Poona in 1988, and have since collaborated at researching and understanding social ageing in a North Indian city, resulting in several oft-quoted articles, and the book under review.

The authors conceptualised their division of labour as 'dialogic' since theoretical and epistemological differences exist between anthropology and

psychology. They have chosen to explore a 'middle path between the tendencies of [the] two disciplines' (p. ix). Being a psychologist, Chadha takes responsibility for handling the complex statistical measures. Being an Indian, Delhite, Punjabi and a native speaker of the languages spoken by the 'community', he conducted the interviews, though van Willigen too participated in about a third of them.

Anthropologists are committed to placing culture traits, social institutions, customs and practices in their relevant contexts, to gauge the 'within' meanings. This is what van Willigen does best. His Kentucky 'community' of older persons is often compared with the Indian counterparts. The authors offer a commentary on certain interesting similarities and differences between the two situations, conscious of the qualitatively different social worlds. For instance, the size of the primary groups of older people in both Kentucky and Delhi is similar.

Both authors agree that the theoretical underpinning of Indian gerontological research is poorly developed. Clearly, Indian scholars often make a wholesale application of a theory developed in the West without thought to its relevance and context in India. This 'mimicry', as the authors describe it (p. x), suppresses the specific (i.e. cultural) characteristics of the local situation, the specific strategies the people adopt to survive in a particular milieu. This leads us to think that despite cultural differences people respond similarly to the predicaments of life and society. Social researchers have time and again exploded the myth of human generality which is created at the expense of particularity. Theory is best grounded in empirical reality.

The authors' theorising draws on their dialogue from the vantage points of their respective disciplines and cultural backgrounds. Their approach to theory is inductive; they move from the findings of empirical research in India to certain general propositions.

Social ageing refers to the changes in the content and meaning of peoples' behaviour and expectations over time. People take adaptive decisions with the passage of time to ensure their optimum survival. The content of such decisions, as also the resultant sociological context, is determined by their culture. Social ageing should be distinguished from biological ageing – the former is a cultural construction of the inevitability of the latter process.

van Willigen and Chadha build their theory of social ageing around five interconnected themes. But in what way does a holistic theory of social ageing emerge from this inter-relatedness is not spelt out anywhere in the book. This matter is left to the individual readers' analytical and theoretical abilities.

For understanding social ageing we need a developmentally-oriented view of life. While gerontologists concern themselves with the later periods (often 55 years and above) of individuals' lives, the conceptualization of the 'twilight' of life is dependent upon understanding the preceding phases right from the time of birth. Second, culture conditions the choices individuals make in their lives. The meanings people ascribe to their actions derive from culture. So do their models of the world, the phases in the life of an individual, role expectations and values. Third, history shapes and is shaped by social ageing. Demographic shifts influence our conception of ageing. For instance, the political economy of a nation is affected by the proportion of people who happen to be living primarily as consuming members (this includes a significant proportion of the aged). This feedback relationship of history and ageing is perhaps under-researched.

Fourth, people's social lives are expressions of individual agency and power. Though each individual makes personal choices about life in every community, this needs to be distinguished from individualism. Some individuals enjoy a wide choice set, others face highly restricted choices. In the same way, some persons exercise a great deal of power, others little, an important source of power being control over economic resources.

Finally, drawing on Claude Levi-Strauss' structuralism, is the idea that the human mind provides the structure within which social life occurs. The nature of human cognition is relevant to social ageing. This raises interesting questions, such as, Which cognitive patterns are associated with senescence? Why is it that the primary group in widely separated situations happens to comprise 25 individuals (p. 142-3)? van Willigen and Chadha opine that just as research on the impact of history on ageing and vice versa, the underlying structure of the human mind and the phenomenon of ageing and dotage too remains under-researched.

The basis of social life is interdependence between its members which is facilitated through exchange, the process of institutionalised give and take. Exchange theory, built around the mechanism of exchange, suggests that the individual's position in society is shaped by the content and nature of exchange

(p. 8). Exchange is conditioned by the values of hierarchy, power differentials, wealth inequalities; it also reproduces the system. For example, people in the upper strata may offer gifts to those in the lower strata without receiving anything in return; these unreturnable gifts reinforce their position of superiority. The resultant inequality is reversed in the case of wife-givers and wife-takers in a patrilineal society wherein the former remains inferior to the latter although they not only transfer a woman (sister or daughter) but also a large number of prestations (dowry) without ever expecting reciprocity.

Imbalance in reciprocity surfaces when individuals start withdrawing from active interaction. Though many explanatory reasons are advanced, an important one is that as the power resource level of an individual declines and he realises his inability to maintain the norm of reciprocity (or redistribution), the best strategy for him is to withdraw. Withdrawal may help him maintain some esteem, while at the same time absolving him from the gruelling demands of interaction.

As a person's economic resources and power declines, his social world, the ensemble of social networks, also starts shrinking. Individuals interact because without it social life cannot be conducted; also because it is rewarding, in material, social, and psychological terms. Exchange theory questions the functional premise that interaction is a result of normative expectations and it fulfils socially required needs. Rather, the argument is that transactions are rewarding (and human beings are 'earthly') and individuals know about the advantages that flow from them. Exchange theory is post-functional; it focuses on the individual's motivation to participate and emphasises the inequality of rewards and inequality in social relations.

Exchange theory may yield profitable results in social gerontology. As individuals age, they experience a decrease in power resources to which they adapt through choice. This leads to a decrease in their social interaction. van Willigen and Chadha argue that exchange theory also explains why individuals decide to disengage themselves from the social world.

Another theory, important for a discussion of social ageing, is known as the disengagement theory. Advanced first in the 1960s, this theory submits that as people grow older, their frequency of social relations reduces, their interaction with the people around them becomes thinner and restricted, and they restructure the goals of their life. Not only do the aged want to disengage themselves but others (the so-called 'engaged lot') expect the older people to do just that. If they fail to dis-

engage, they may even invite vituperations. The norms may be relaxed for the disengaged; so also the expectations from them. Certain cultures (like the Indian) place high premium on disengagement, describing old age as a return to infancy and old people as 'children' (*burha baccha ek saman*). Just as norms and sanctions are relaxed for children, so are they for the aged.

One consequence of disengagement is that the individual becomes less vertically integrated with people of other (younger) age groups. His integration with his own age grade, horizontal integration, could certainly be far greater. This explains the success of several senior citizens' associations. Through disengagement the individual adapts to the two facts of life: the gradual decrement of strength and the expectation of death. Disengagement prepares a person to face his imminent departure. Disengagement theorists believe that theory is universally applicable, though mediated by culture. Equally, gender responses to disengagement are highly variable. In India, for instance, older women are less disengaged in comparison to their male counterparts.

Although severely criticised, disengagement theory stimulated substantial new research and analysis, as also the development of alternative theories relating to social welfare and geriatric practices. One of them, 'activity theory', which argues that successful ageing is contingent upon continued activity. If old people continue to work, remain preoccupied with activities, they will have greater life satisfaction, will not suffer from role loss, will have something to look forward to, and will remain integrated in society, both vertically and horizontally.

More than test disengagement theory, van Willigen and Chadha examine the lives of north Indian old people from the perspective of the various themes in an effort to constitute a theory of social ageing. They identify the cultural institutions that 'influence and provide meaning to social ageing processes' (p. 18) such as *asrama* (the vocations of life), *varna* (ritual ranking based on ascriptive categories), *purdah* (veiling, indicative of female seclusion), and the joint family pattern. It may be noted at the outset that the institution of *varnasrama* is essentially Hindu. Its utility, therefore, in understanding social ageing in other religious communities is doubtful, although they too value disengagement from worldly affairs.

Crucial to an understanding of social ageing in Hindu communities (and the authors worked chiefly with north Indian Hindus) are the institutions of *purushartha* (the 'aims of life') and *asrama* (the 'stages

of life'). The former is a theoretical delineation of what humans should do, the meaning of their existence, how they are different from animals (*dharma*), how they should reproduce their own kind and the society (*kama* and *artha*), and how they should ensure their permanent release from the incessant cycle of birth, death and rebirth (*moksha*). The theory of *purushartha* offers a fine coexistence of the ideas of materialism and spiritualism; in the hierarchy it aims, *moksha* occupies the highest place and *kama* (carnal satisfaction) the lowest.

*Purushartha* finds a concrete expression in the practice of *asrama*, the vocations of life. The final release (of soul and its merger with the supreme soul, the *paramatman*) is possible when one renounces the world (*samnyasa*) after having disengaged oneself from the social world (during the third stage of life called *vanaprastha*). van Willigen and Chadha explore the relevance of this cultural model of engagement (in the vocations of celibate-student and householder) and disengagement (in the vocations of forest-dweller and renouncer) to the people in contemporary urban India. However, it must be remembered that the *purushartha-asrama vyavastha* (organisation of aims and stages of life) is relevant essentially for males of the Brahmin caste. Historians of ancient India point out that for the Kshatriya males death in the battlefield represented salvation; in other words, *purushartha* for the Kshatriya and Vaishya was different from what it was for the Brahmins. Disengagement had a different cultural content in different communities: going to the battlefield (often dressed like a renouncer) was symbolic of disengagement from the social world.

van Willigen and Chadha carried out their study in an upper class neighbourhood of Delhi, Rana Pratap Bagh. We do not know how they determined the class position of their respondents: Was it subjective, that is, based on how people described themselves in class terms, or was it an objective assessment? The survey data was drawn from a systematic, random sample of people (53% men and 47% women), 55 years and older (the age-range of their sample was 55 years to 90 years, the mean age being 65.6 years), through open-ended interviewing, participant observation, and a review of documents. Ethnographic research was carried out in the community as a whole. However, they do not specify which activities of the community they participated in, since they used participant observation as one of the techniques of data collection.

The chapters 'The Household and Social Ageing' and 'Networks: the World Beyond the Family', provide a sophisticated analysis of the data collected. The

former chapter analyses the social life of the aged people in the context of their households, the problems they face and their responses to them. It describes the nature of integration that older people have with their families and households. The chapter on networks focuses on the integration of the aged with the external world.

van Willigen and Chadha used 'interaction frequency categories to produce the list of persons that made up the network' (p. 120). Neighbours formed an important category of networks. In women's networks, there were more neighbours than was the case with men. Friends were the other component of network – men had more friends than women, indicating that they participated more in extra-domestic realms than the women, whose social world was confined largely to the household. The older people, mostly men, also participated in several associations, such as trusts and charitable societies, religious study groups, card playing groups, informal conversational circles, kitty parties (mainly women), worship groups, devotional singing (*kirtan*) groups, political parties, and street organisations.

Unlike expectations based on exchange theory, persons with smaller networks did not come across as healthier than others. They had lower incomes and exercised lower control over their worlds. They were also less satisfied with their lives. The mean network size of those who were placed in the rung of 'low satisfaction', in the life scale was 21.6; those classified in the 'high satisfaction' rung had a mean network size of 30.7 individuals (p. 134). Successful ageing requires a network of at least 25 individuals. This in turn is dependent upon material wealth, power relations, and degree of control over life.

These networks perform several functions; in particular by providing a group with which the individual can share grievances and frustrations emerging from the household. For instance, a widower may come home after severely criticising (and thereafter feeling 'light') his daughter-in-law in his conversational circle, and thereby find an outlet for his frustrations! Successful ageing is a function of health, power, and social involvement. It also depends upon the community ecology: if the community is homogeneous, there are greater chances for the emergence of mutual support associations.

However, gender distinctions are crucial. van Willigen and Chadha argue that power structures associated with the patrilineal, patrilocal, and patriarchal joint families constrain the ability of females to

achieve successful ageing (pp. 138-9). Also, the control women exercise over their environment and household varies with age. A newly-married woman is powerless in a patri-joint family; yet she may get her way by using negative strategies such as crying, expressing displeasure, getting angry, refusing to speak, denying sex to her husband, and so on. By comparison, an old woman (the mother of grown-up sons) can get her decisions implemented in a positive manner – by relying on respect for age, or by operating through the medium of her sons and grandsons.

Women enjoy invisible power in joint families; they differ in how they exercise it. Most observers hypothesize that women are more easily able to adapt themselves to the demands of the household, particularly through daughters-in-law and grandchildren, than men; this may explain why widows are more integrated within households than widowers. Studies focusing on gender differentials, ageing, and power might provide answers to these questions.

Vinay Kumar Srivastava

**THE FIRST FIVE YEARS: A Critical Perspective on Early Childhood Care and Education** edited by Mina Swaminathan. Sage, Delhi, 1998.

THIS book is a must read for all those who consider themselves to be educators, particularly those who see education as a lever for societal change. For those of us who sit in urban isolation, far from the rural reality, it is as if 'turning and turning in the widening gyre the falcon no longer knows the falconer' (Yeats, *The Second Coming*). The commitment and dedication of those who have set up the various ECCE programmes gives a new tilt to the words that management gurus claim always go together, 'leadership and management'. Since the success of the projects described in the book is directly related to the quality of community participation achieved, one wonders whether management has any role at all to play in evolving leadership models.

The first part of the book is a veritable cornucopia of indigenous, educational endeavours packaged in the various case studies and moulded to shape and suit diverse terrains, people and sensitive local issues. Each of the cases discussed are unique and inspirational like the Mobile Crèches programme and the tale of Ambapali which introduces the NGO-government interface, or the Integrated Child Development Services programme run through Urmul. The story of how



SEWA, through hard work and dedication, gave birth to Shaishav which in turn empowered the women of Kheda district is of great significance. Equally illuminating is the excellent community-based model of a pre-school programme developed by the Palmyrah Workers' Development Society in the Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari districts of Tamil Nadu.

In an environment conditioned by media focus on lost causes and sensationalism, the warmth and positive flavour that pervades *The First Five Years* makes the book an inspirational heart warmer. This is especially relevant at a time when the Budget 2000 is out and the government has once again seen fit to increase allocation for Human Resource Development by a miserly .09% from 3.23% to 3.29% while increasing defence allotment to a whopping 19.51% of the plan outlay. The Probe report (OUP 1999) provides historical evidence of our government's continuous make-shift treatment to education over the years. Clearly yet another age is to go by before we focus attention at the marginalised in our country, the women and children in particular. Despite the Budget 2000 continuing this skewed vision we have no cause to despair, particularly if we believe the message in this book: The meek will yet inherit the earth!

The book is divided into two parts. The first part offers a micro perspective through documenting eight innovations in early childhood care and education in India; the second provides the macro perspective through six state of the art essays on the current status of ECCE in the country. The first two essays of part two provide the main background against which most of the other material presented can be viewed, especially the first eight vignettes. Margaret Khalkdena's essay, titled Early Childhood Care and Education in India, presents a historical perspective, tracing the development of ECCE in all its various colours and dimensions – from the early 17th century, through the colonial era and the introduction of the primary school system by the British, into the post colonial era, the framing of the Constitution in 1950 and in particular, Article 45, 'The state must endeavour to provide free and compulsory education for all children until they complete 14 years of age' (p. 168). Khalakdena traces the evolution of organized thinking on ECCE. She points out how the government has constantly shifted its stance on ECCE, never quite sure of where it wants to go. 'The subject of child welfare seems to have been apportioned an irregular staccato rhythm which could perhaps be expressed in the words: start... halt... shift... restart' (Luthra, 1979).

It was subsequent to the Fifth Plan that the government realized the importance of community participation and changed focus to supplementing the family rather than supplanting it (Myers, 1992). Khalakdena also highlights the stellar work by the voluntary sector and points to its spirit of dedication, commitment, teamwork, closeness to community and its continuous efforts at evolving new strategies based on the needs of the situation despite low remuneration in the sector. By comparison the private sector is characterized by a lack of vision and understanding about the needs and psychology of the pre-school child. What it offers can best be characterized as 'care shops' (p. 183) – places to prepare children for admission into the competitive primary schools.

Vinita Kaul points out how the growth of the ECCE movement showed that in the absence of appropriate and adequate training of teachers and workers, one could be left with a pre-school curriculum that is both 'child unfriendly' and 'burdensome'. She analyses the existing training programmes, highlighting the problems faced by the trainees who pass out from the Nursery Training Institutes, particularly vis-à-vis language. She also juxtaposes the one/two year teacher training programmes with those specifically offered by the various ECCE experiments, such as the training module for the workers of the Mobile Crèches programme. The Mobile Crèches offers an integrated programme which includes a crèche, a balwadi, non-formal education and adult education.

Francis Sinha focuses on ways to appraise the cost effectiveness of child-care programmes. She points to the differences between 'effectiveness' and 'efficiency', particularly in programmes which value the human quality both in terms of the teacher/worker as well as the learner/beneficiary. 'A programme is efficient if goals and objectives are achieved at a reasonable cost' (p. 211). To overcome this point, Sinha suggests methods of analyzing cost-effectiveness in quantified but non-financial terms by linking effectiveness to programme goals and objectives. An extremely interesting essay, especially for those who would like to use available resources in a disciplined manner to get maximum mileage.

All the case studies explore the interface between women's empowerment and child care. Rajalakshmi Sriram's article provides a perceptive and detailed analysis of this interface, complete with historical perspective. She correctly points out that in order for the empowerment process to take place among women it is necessary 'that women find time and space of their

own to re-examine their lives critically and collectively' (p. 224). Child care facilities not only give women the much needed time and space for introspection but also permit them to work both without anxiety about the welfare of their child, and thus increases their incomes and self-esteem and standing in the family and community.

The subsequent overview essays lend further depth to the various case studies. Each essay is a standing testimony to the dedication of the voluntary sector in particular through the vision and leadership of individuals, who are largely women, in transforming the lives of women and children in the rural sector. The case studies that discuss the problems faced by projects involving government and voluntary sector cooperation shed further light on the issue of cost effectiveness. It is clear that wherever the human element is important part and the programme concentrates on the process rather than on the product, we cannot go by simple cost effectivity.

*The First Five Years* is as much a labour of love as a lucid and analytical study of an area that requires a more detailed look by the government, private and voluntary sector if we are to see any change in the scenario as it exists today.

**Annie Koshi**

**INDIA'S ELDERLY: Burden or Challenge? by**

**S. Irudaya Rajan, U.S. Mishra and P. Sankara Sarma.**  
**Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1999.**

THIS book explores the widespread feeling that the elderly are becoming a burden in Indian society. By defining India as an ageing nation, the authors caution us about the implications of an increasing growth rate of the elderly population, accompanied by a decline in the growth rate of the general population. They speculate that the decreasing rate of mortality may convert the country into a nation with a greater population of old, frail and dependent people presenting a burden on the socio-economic and health infrastructure if adequate measures are not taken for the well being of older persons. The transition from high to low fertility is expected to narrow the age structure at its base while broadening the same at the tip. For instance, by 2021 the growth rate of the elderly would be one and a half times higher than the growth rate of the general population.

The book under review studies the demographic transition and imbalances in the elderly population across the various states and union territories of India

with special reference to Kerala. The authors indicate that the states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Punjab are likely to experience a rapid increase in their old age population in the coming decades. The demographic transition coupled with various socio-economic changes, would drastically impact the lives of the elderly. The book draws attention to the emergence of nuclear families, smaller number of children per couple, greater longevity, physical separation of parents from adult children as a result of rapid urbanization and age-selective rural-urban migration, which alters the dynamics of relationships between old and young generations. The discussion takes note of low literacy levels, marital status, economic situation and living arrangements of older persons. In this context the authors assess the future size and composition of the elderly society as well as their needs and the difficulties they face with regard to health, social adjustment and dependence. The book highlights that these issues become particularly critical for older women. Quite clearly, gender issues are relevant in analysis of population ageing as the proportion of elderly females increases faster than males in the older age groups.

The authors review the concept of adequate social security for the elderly meticulously. Despite the various provisions and facilities available in the country, much more is needed to provide equal opportunity, employment, social security and welfare to all. Efforts for poverty alleviation and providing financial security among the old need to be sensitive to both the rural-urban divide as well as the organized and unorganized sector differentials. The chapter on Policies and Programmes through a detailed study of numerous provisions like the provident fund, gratuity, life insurance and pension schemes, exposes the need to improve operational efficiency for successful implementation.

The overview of the findings of the National Sample Survey seems somewhat amiss since a couple of earlier books have already provided a thorough analysis. The detailed analysis from the ageing survey carried out by the authors with the collaboration of various leading research institutes in India is, however, welcome. An understanding of the situation of residential institutions for the elderly in the major states in India conducted through a mail survey is illuminating, as are the findings of the survey conducted among the inhabitants of old age institutions in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The perceptions of the elderly gathered through group discussions throws fresh light on the meaning of old age, the advantages and disadvantages of being old, preferred living arrangements, community

involvement and the specific needs of elderly persons. It is significant how pertinent questions of retirement, re-employment, inequalities in pension and difficulty in obtaining benefits from social assistance schemes are to the elderly. The brief case studies, presented in the form of life histories, reflect different experiences of ageing which are meaningful for understanding variations among a cross-section of the elderly. The final chapter questions the conventional definition of the elderly (60 and above) and calls for a re-examination of the retirement age along with age dependency ratios.

The book would enlighten policy makers and researchers on the needs of the elderly, reorienting ones thinking to make the 'burden' as a 'challenge'.

**Bhavna Puri**

**THE FAMILY IN INDIA: Critical Essays by**  
A.M. Shah. Orient Longman, Delhi, 1998.

A.M Shah's book brings together eight essays published earlier. In the first essay he discusses the terminologies—elementary family, joint family, household and extended family, and the ambiguities he perceives in their conceptualisation by various sociologists. He makes a distinction between joint household and joint family. He accepts the legal conceptualisation of joint family, understood as jointness in property ownership and ritual performance of *shraddha* citing for this purpose Hindu Law and the *Mitaksara*. The members of a joint family on the other hand can well be residing in separate households. For the elementary and joint households, he uses the terms 'simple' and 'complex'.

The functional aspects of joint household and family are also discussed in this essay. In the former, Shah emphasises kinship composition, while in the latter, he stresses joint property ownership and ritual participation. He points to the sociological gap in the legal definition of joint family which overlooks the 'household' dimension and the pattern of residence, in this restricted sense that legally even an elementary family would be considered 'joint'. According to Shah, joint households are formed with the addition of extra members in the elementary family, and they can be patrilineal, matrilineal, or fraternal extended, with common residence and hearth. The joint family, however, represents separate households linked by a range of social, economic, ritual, and ceremonial relationships, governed by kinship positions which cannot be reduced to mere property relations.

In the next chapter, the author explores the changes in the household dimension of Indian society. He refutes the widely held belief that the erstwhile rural Indian joint family was the norm which under the impact of urbanisation disintegrated into the nuclear family. He reiterates the necessity to distinguish between household and family to avoid indiscriminate use of the latter term, which entails members having separate residences either in terms of simple or smaller joint households, but bound by a multitude of relationships.

Further, Shah lays stress on collecting the detailed composition of households to help delineate their various types and their frequency. He discusses the ongoing process of development and factors that lead to change in size of the household, thereby enabling a coexistence of simple and complex households at any point of time. The separation of households does not, however, sever the multiple familial ties. Contrary to the widespread belief that modernisation and industrialisation have enforced a nuclear family norm, the size of the household has been steadily increasing owing to a stronger influence of Sanskritization and adherence to traditional norms, notwithstanding migration and a general process in which the dispersed simple households become complex.

Shah extends this analysis by examining popular assumptions and media projections that the joint household is being replaced by the simple, nuclear household. Through an analysis of census data from 1871 to 1951, he first demonstrates that the joint household was never the norm. Its incidence was greater among higher castes and the business class which constituted a minor proportion of the population. Further, it existed more as a textual norm of joint property ownership and ritual participation. Another barrier was the low life expectancy and semi-nomadic life of landless people.

The author then argues that while the emphasis on joint households has declined somewhat for the professional class, it has increased in the rural masses, the urban business class and lower middle class, as well as among lower castes as a tool for Sanskritization and status mobility. This caused an increase in the average size of households and a corresponding increase in the incidence of joint households. It is necessary here to realise the existence of nuclear households in the past in order to gauge the steadily increasing incidence of joint households. Shah further states that even in the urban, westernised, highly educated professional class, married children tend to stay with their parents and, if possible, take care of them, thereby still sustaining

small yet joint households. Thus, socio-psychological, economic, demographic and status-oriented factors have contributed to a higher incidence of joint households.

In the next piece the author discusses the tensions and conflicts inherent in inter-personal relations, complex behaviour patterns of members of a traditional joint household, and how they lead to its dispersal. This dispersal is processual and if explicated step by step, places the household in varying contexts. The conflicting emotions and heartburn finally lead to the partition of the joint household. The author describes how the kinship composition of the household, education, an increase in age at marriage, and need to care for the aged dictate the nature of conflicts and the extent to which unity is preserved.

The next two essays titled 'Inter-household Family Relations' and 'Lineage Structure and Change in a Gujarat Village' explore the terms 'household' and 'joint family', distinguishing them from lineage. In the first, Shah conducts a systematic enquiry into the relationships between family members residing in separate households. The multi-functional joint family is distinguished from the lineage in its legal and scriptural sense, as a three to four generation group of males with their wives and children who enjoy rights in joint property and in the performance of ancestral *shraddha* rituals. The patrilineal kinship relations beyond this three or four generation family are understood as lineage relations.

In the next chapter we learn that the lineage span is much longer and requires the study of historical data and genealogical records in addition to the contemporary life of the people. The author highlights the increase in lineage groups within castes, enumerating as causal factors population growth per generation in patriline, and the increased interest in genealogical records used as tools for social mobility and high status rank. Shah believes that the importance of lineage as a corporate group has declined among landowners and the privileged class with the removal of hereditary privileges in rural society and its declining role in politics. However, it has gained importance in groups who have acquired land and other assets and are literate enough to preserve their genealogical records. Further, marriage alliances are regulated according to the lineage affiliations and great significance is attached to the lineage groups in ritual occasions, lifecycle events, status differentiation, veneration of lineage deities, and folk culture. Even in modern India, the lineages as functional groups play an important role within the caste.

The author then moves to the studies on the prevalence of caste endogamy in Gujarat. Traditionally, since the principle of caste endogamy governs all marriages, the family becomes embedded in caste. The author describes a range of first to fourth order divisions within castes which are themselves endogamous groups; for these he uses the terms sub-caste and sub-sub caste. He states that each division/unit is significant for endogamy and the violation of the norm at each higher level along with the degree of social distance determines the severity of punishment. In modern, urban society, this situation is changing for with an increase in education and age of marriage, there is an urge to exercise freedom of choice in spouse selection.

In the final essay of the book, Professor Shah decries the lack of academic research on the family and the 'restricted' views of social workers, lawyers, and feminists which have affected family policy. He asserts the fundamental problem of having a uniform policy for India in the face of diverse ethnic, religious groups. The situations becomes more complex given a wide range of family units – simple, complex household, joint family, extended family, lineage.

Further, both popular and sociological discourse has promoted a wrong impression that the joint family is disintegrating. The author demonstrates that the trend is rather towards a spread of joint family relations. The author highlights the contradictions between policies concerning the different elements that constitute the family. On the one hand, responsibility for taking care of the aged is on the sons; on the other, couples are expected not to consider the birth of a son as mandatory in adherence to the two-child norm. The latter also ignores the patrilineal principle governing family and kinship and the equality of status between male and female children, a prerequisite for the norm to gain legitimacy. As the proportion of the aged increases, the traditional preference for son will persist. By making the family responsible, the state has further strengthened it.

Overall, A.M. Shah recognises the limited efficacy of state intervention and policy given its formal structure, disharmony between state and central legislatures, inadequate application of laws, the 'traditional' orientation of the bureaucracy, and so on. He ends by stressing the need for further rigorous research on the family, in particular the degree to which growing individualism is now influencing family matters.

**Meera Ahmad**

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# Comment

## Activism and academic angst

SINCE the 1967 annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, the issue of ethical anthropology or action research has been central to debates within the discipline. In that meeting, several anthropologists like Kathleen Gough and Gerald Berreman wanted to pass a resolution condemning the Vietnam war, while others like Margaret Mead opposed it. Mead argued famously that political resolutions were not in the professional interests of anthropology. The floor, however, was swayed by Michael Harner who declared that 'Genocide is not in the professional interests of anthropology,' and the resolution was passed (Gough 1990: 1705).

Now that proactive social science is no longer confined to the Left, especially but not only in India,

several people are beginning to rethink their earlier assumptions on how social science should engage with practical politics. The ICHR's recent decision to recall two volumes of the *Towards Freedom* project by Professors Panikkar and Sarkar, or the move to tailor textbooks and exam questions to the prejudices of the party in power are both excellent examples of social science research being defined in terms of 'political correctness'. One of the charges frequently levelled by the Right in its effort to appropriate the bureaucratic posts that supervise and fund research is that these posts were formerly bastions of the Left, who used them to push its own version of secular democratic history. Historical Materialism, according to our honourable Hindu historians, was then politically correct and now needs to be corrected politically.

It is worthwhile in this context to remind ourselves of the legacy of much of this proactive social science on the Left, broadly defined. My argument here

\* This article originated in a panel discussion initiated by Majid Siddiqui on the 'pro-active and the politically correct' at the India International Centre in February. I am grateful to Majid and other participants in the discussion for their insights.



is that leftist preoccupations with the political underpinnings of their research are qualitatively different from those of the Right, not because of the soundness of their ideology per se but because they have generated new directions and methods in social science research. I write here from the perspective of my own discipline – what is regarded as anthropology in the US or UK and the twinned discipline of sociology/anthropology in India.

As a result of decolonisation and other radical movements in the '60s and '70s, there emerged a great deal of self questioning in all disciplines, reflected in journals like the *New Left Review*, or *Economic and Political Weekly*, to name two popular ones. These concerns led to a variety of theoretical shifts and new trends in the social sciences. In anthropology, this was reflected in newly developing fields such as feminist anthropology, Marxist anthropology which discovered class in age-sets and non-industrial societies, anthropological political economy which studied the contribution of imperialism in the formation of class, community and culture, and more recently, political ecology. Although conservative economists like Milton Friedman have been important to the disciplinary mainstream of economics, one is hard put to think of a single right-wing anthropologist who has pushed the discipline rightwards in a major way, or who has produced entirely new arenas of study. At best, debates have taken place over the symbolic versus material factors underlying social cohesion, or between so-called post-modernists and political economists, but much of this has been within a broadly democratic consensus. Of course, in the Indian context, the old Indological work on caste and religion continues, but there are also plenty of countervailing studies.

Apart from the efflorescence of fields, political engagement on the Left has resulted in three broad directions of research: (i) an increasing focus on the impact of colonialism in shaping many apparently sociologically given categories such as caste or tribe. This was accompanied by an examination of the 'invention of tradition' which accompanied nationalist movements seeking to create ancient traditions for themselves; (ii) the trend towards 'reflexive anthropology'. By focusing on their own ancestors, anthropologists looked at the complicity of their own discipline in the invention of traditions, as also at the way in which the writing of ethnography distanced and marginalised the 'other'; (iii) the activist approach going under the names of 'development anthropology', applied anthropology, or 'action research'.

Academic interventions under each of these headings have been useful in challenging the status quo, both in real life and in the discipline. They have produced new and exciting ways of doing research – the use of history and literary criticism for example, or multi-sited ethnography instead of the single village, caste or religion study that dominated anthropology earlier. Yet, even within this iconoclastic tradition, there is the danger of new gods being installed, of political activism coming full circle and boomeranging on its protagonists. Below, I focus on two such dilemmas: the role of anthropologists in attacking essentialisms and invented traditions, and second, the role of social scientists in development studies. Ultimately, my argument is that one is brought back to the question of what counts as good research, or productive research, given the current standards of the discipline.

A favourite 'essentialism' that has long been the staple of anthropological attack is the notion of tribe. So long as anthropologists were attacking the notion of tribe developed by colonial anthropologists, they could unambiguously describe themselves as politically correct. For instance, in pointing out that tribes were not small bounded homogenous units, that they had no basis in race, that they were involved in diverse occupations, and had enjoyed political power based on internal stratification etc., anthropologists were challenging conceptions that had helped to sustain colonial rule. Pointing to the commonalities between adivasis and other groups around them could be part of a legitimate anti-colonial project in the face of attempts to preserve adivasi areas as legitimate objects for colonial paternalism.

However, the same kinds of arguments against the indigeneity of 'tribal' or adivasi populations in India, or against the theory of Aryan conquest, or against the idea that adivasi religions in central India are not sharply distinguished from folk Hinduism, often seems to support the Hindu fundamentalist argument which claims adivasis as 'backward Hindus'. They also come into conflict with adivasi movements which have adopted categories of indigeneity as part of their claims to the land. The claim that adivasis were first displaced by Aryans is a useful rejoinder when Hindutva forces attempt to claim some sort of historic victimisation or displacement. In a world where categories are created through reference to multiple publics in multiple contexts, the claim to have a deep connection to the environment is often a useful political tool to employ in the face of obdurate states intent on preserving their control over resources. In such con-

texts, anthropological critiques, both of certain categories like indigenous peoples or certain environmental movements, are doubly problematic.

In fact, much of the research on marginalised groups like adivasis or on social movements came about due to a desire to engage with political action, and do pro-active research. But in the process, anthropologists or sociologists have often highlighted the manner in which these groups construct identities, and the global sources of their self-descriptions, e.g. in North American environmentalism. As Peter Brosius has pointed out in a recent discussion in *Current Anthropology* (1999), there is a certain irony in the fact that critiques of essentialism which began as critiques of structures that perpetuate inequality have ended up turning against those who are challenging this inequality. Perhaps there is a need to make a distinction between the essentialism of the oppressor and the oppressed.

On the other hand, one might argue that any essentialism, especially one based on identity, is dangerous, regardless of who is claiming that identity. Certain categories, especially those involving identity and exclusion such as 'indigenous' lend themselves more easily to passion. They also enjoy better circulation in a globalised world where donor lending and military action have increasingly intervened to defend identities defined in religious or ethnic terms at the expense of identities based on other attributes such as class.

In other aspects, however, it is less easy to feel certain about the correctness of one's stand. For example, movements like Narmada Bachao Andolan or the fishworkers' movement are often criticised for claiming that adivasis or fishworkers want to preserve an environmentally friendly lifestyle, when in fact the adivasis and fishworkers themselves want all the attributes of an unsustainable lifestyle. This is pointed to as evidence of the essentialism of these movements and their leaders, or at best the use of 'strategic essentialism' in some political interest (see for example Baviskar 1997, Gupta, 1999). Yet, there is no corresponding focus on the essentialism of the market, or on the power of the hegemonic discourse which makes people reject their earlier lifestyles as backward. If movement leaders put words into the mouths of their followers, so do the state and market, and much more successfully at that, through all the advertising and official power at their service.

Opposing romantic essentialism or strategic essentialism to some authentic identity as described by a social scientist is problematic in that all identities

are relational and contingent upon particular discourses and contexts. At various times people may want to drink Pepsi and drive around in fast cars, or watch Madhuri Dixit films on TV, without, however, wanting to lose out on their ancestral homes or destroy their traditional fishing grounds. To claim that environmentalism is an ideology foisted by activists on adivasis or fisherpeople because it appeals to international audiences ignores the local material context of this ideology. In his discussion of what fisherfolk hope to protect when they demand their 'right to nature' (Gupta 1999: 2316-7), Gupta assumes that their only concern is bettering their own livelihoods, which could be served by everyone being given assistance to acquire trawlers. However, as Aparna Sundar shows, the opposition to trawlers fishing in the monsoon is not because of envy, but because ordinary fishers and not just their leaders have an ecological understanding of the sea and its resources: 'When I suggested that the solution might be assistance for all fishers to acquire trawlers, I was told, "And will there be enough fish for that? The government encourages us to 'develop', to buy trawlers. But can we all do so? Can everyone own a plane or even fly in one"?' (Sundar 1999: 105-106). Of course, not every adivasi or fisher is an environmentalist. As in every society, there are class differences among them; some are more aware and articulate or just plain interested compared to others. Certainly, however, not all the voicing of environmentalism is due to outside activists, as the state would like to claim.

Calling something or someone 'essentialist' has become the favoured form of abuse in the social sciences these days, a superior variant to the older 'stereotype'. Yet, perhaps, we need to pause in our wholesale attack on essentialism and examine the context in which we make the critique. An argument that is commonly made is that the anthropologist or sociologist has a professional duty to her discipline, which requires the production of truth, however unpalatable to the activists with and on whom she has done her research. This, however, often tends to be a rather self-serving argument, defining the 'truth' as whatever the anthropologist wants it to be. If one claims to be writing the truth about a people or a movement, that writing should be accessible to the people concerned to present their own version of truth. This is of course not a simple issue – some like the pseudo-Hindus of Benaras may refuse to recognise truths about themselves in a film like *Water* – but it is at least worth trying. It is also productive of better research. In many cases our 'truth' is based on short term research, which

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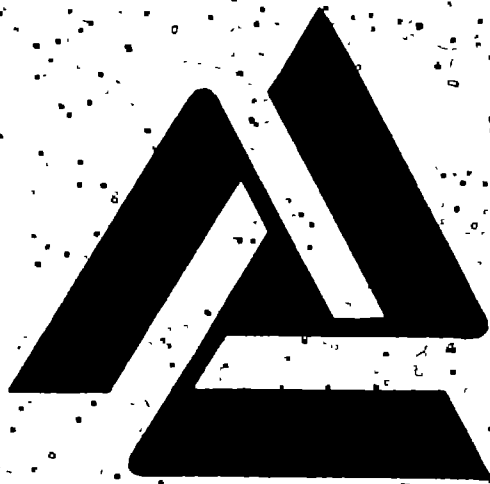
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we ourselves may want to revise later in the light of disagreements or new evidence.

Just as the critique of essentialism has come full circle, raising several uncomfortable questions for social scientists, the emphasis on action research that has been so much a part of the anthropological critique since the 1970s has rebounded on the academy. The need to promote multivocality or dialogue within participant observation or the need to rethink ways in which anthropologists could help and repay people with whom they lived and studied led to the promotion of advocacy and development anthropology. The latter had the additional benefit of creating full time employment as anthropologists promoted themselves as virtuous 'bottom up' members of 'top down' teams.

Increasingly, however, the idea of proactive research is being taken away from the universities and placed within the domain of NGOs and consultants. Research that directly feeds into development projects is seen as action research. From the point of view of society or funders, there are many advantages to research being funded outside universities. For one, NGOs are often able to identify new issues, when academics are bound by the conventions of their field or by whatever theory is fashionable at the moment. Environment comes to mind, for instance, as a good example of a field where academic research has piggybacked on activist research. Other examples include feminist research, philanthropy and urban planning. NGOs are also often quicker to produce results and in a form that can be used by practitioners.

At the same time, there are several dangers in letting donors and NGOs define what is proactive research, and simultaneously define the proactive as the politically correct. First, research that is ostensibly done in collaboration with the subjects in pursuit of a particular agenda is glorified with the name participatory research, without questioning whether the agenda itself, such as joint forest management or family planning, is something that was developed in participatory fashion. Second, once a subject becomes fashionable, there is a tendency for people to jump on the bandwagon and produce endless case studies, many of which have limited value. Certainly, very little justifies the amount of funding that goes into such case studies with consultants charging fees that range from 2500-3000 a day. Third, the amount of money that goes into so-called research consultancies also undermines research that goes on in universities. It is hard for universities with comparatively limited resources to retain people, and besides, the pressure of having to

compete with such organisations for funds means that much research in universities also tends to become project oriented, short term and driven solely by whether or not there are any policy implications. Finally, what tends to happen as a result of such donor driven research is an excessive focus on the poor as against a focus on the rich, on the presence or absence of social capital among the poor instead of how the practice of capitalism impedes development in a systematic manner.

Clearly, there is a need for research, whether inside or outside universities and unless universities and academic institutions clean up their act first, they are in no position to complain. Perhaps the first step towards proactive research, then, would be to direct attention to one's own institutional setting. Teachers who don't take classes, the practice of Ph.D supervisors hiring their own students as soon as they become heads of department, and all the myriad sins practised by academics need to be studied and written about. There was no protest, for instance, when a national research institute in Bangalore used the excuse that the rules did not permit someone without an MA in sociology from becoming a professor of sociology simply in order to keep someone out and appoint an internal candidate. Never mind that the person excluded just happened to be India's leading environmental sociologist. Such egregious nepotism, not by Hindutva activists or Marxists, but simply middle of the road, unremarkable academics, is exactly the sort of thing that lays the ground for far more dangerous ideological nepotism. Only if one tackles this will one be in a position to tackle the problem of political correctness in the Academy and ensure that research is judged by intellectual merit and not just by who is in a position of power at any given time.

**Nandini Sundar**

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# Backpage

WHAT earlier promised to emerge as a stable coalition has now started displaying cracks. The current fragility of the National Democratic Alliance owes little to the self-activity of the opposition parties, they continue to be mired in a morass of self-delusion and squabbling. The problem is entirely an internal one. The BJP, principal partner in the NDA, appears cornered. And contrary to expectations, the strains have been created not by a minor partner misbehaving and demanding more than its due share, but by its ideological fountainhead, the RSS.

For nearly a fortnight, instead of debating the implications of the much touted millennium budget, the Parliament was caught in a log jam. The opposition stalled all proceeding demanding that the Gujarat government revert its decision allowing government servants to take part in the activities of the RSS. Though the central government pointed out that it had no constitutional locus standi in the matter; that the RSS was a highly respected, non-political, socio-cultural organisation; and the RSS leadership itself clarified that it had not sought the revocation of the ordinance listing it as a proscribed organisation for government servants – no one took these clarifications/protestations seriously.

Even the constituents of the NDA – the DMK, TDP and Trinamul Congress – made evident their displeasure. Finally, the government had to relent. Senior party functionaries were despatched to Gandhinagar to make the state government see reason. The matter was resolved, but the government lost face. More than ever before, the schism between the BJP and the RSS came to the fore.

It has been evident for some time now that far from being jubilant about the BJP coming to power for the third time, the RSS leadership appears extremely uncomfortable with the actions and pronouncements of its ideological and organisational offspring. For years, and through some rather difficult times, the RSS has held firm to its worldview. Over time, those sympathetic to its *Weltanschauung* have grown in numbers. It has even acquired legitimacy in the eyes of the modern, urban middle class, more specifically those belonging to the upper caste-class strata.

It now faces the discomfiting situation of many of its favoured formulations being sacrificed at the altar of pragmatism and coalition dharma. Despite being in power (though through a surrogate) both at

the centre and in a few crucial states, it has been unable to place Article 370, Uniform Civil Code, what to speak of the temple at Ayodhya on the agenda, even if on the backburner. Its preferences about swadeshi stand sidelined in the frenzied search for foreign capital and the rush to meet WTO guidelines; the committee to review the Constitution ignores it and makes clear that the basic structure will remain unaltered, even national pride has been given a go by, if the supplication displayed during the Clinton visit is any indication.

None of this can go down well with those who believe that they live by values and principles. Worse, those faithful deputed to keep the party on 'the straight and narrow' themselves seem to have been corrupted by the lure of power.

Is this because the basic relationship between the BJP and the RSS is altering? If in the past the BJP appeared dependant on the RSS, not just for ideological coherence but for dedicated cadres during elections, the situation today seems to have been reversed. The BJP, by reinventing itself, enlarging its social catchment and engineering effective coalitions, has grown from a 8% party to one garnering close to a quarter of the vote. The ability to dispense patronage and collect funds has provided it relative autonomy from the RSS.

The RSS, on the other hand, like most ideologically rigid cadre-based organisations seems to be facing difficulty in renewing itself. Its ability to attract fresh cadres, particularly from among the 'suitable' young remains suspect, despite claims about the phenomenal growth of the *shakhas*. Its efforts at social engineering by opening up leadership positions to the OBCs has often boomeranged. Remember the 'revolts' of a Kalyan Singh or a Shankersinh Waghela.

Yet, it cannot quite afford to fundamentally rock the boat. It is still unlikely that any other regime would be more favourably disposed to it; the chances of a deal like the one with Indira Gandhi in 1980 remain low. So all it can do is to fester in anguish, episodically inflicting pinpricks through a Murli Manohar Joshi, the flavour of the season. The recent elevation of K.S. Sudarshan as the *Sarsanghchalak* makes clear that the RSS is unwilling to live with its marginalisation. If anything, it will seek to reassert itself. Clearly we have interesting, and dangerous, times ahead.

Harsh Sethi

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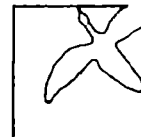


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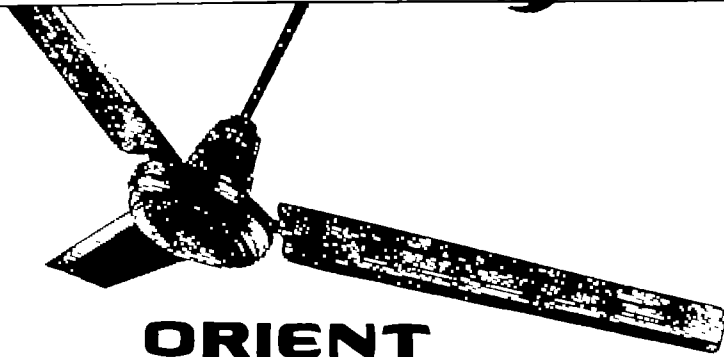
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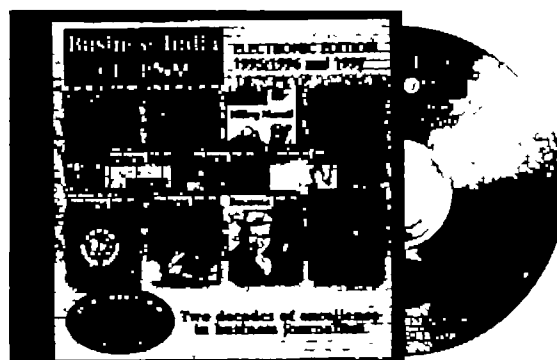


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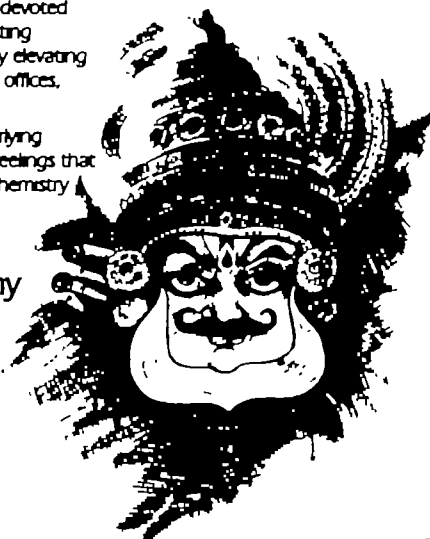
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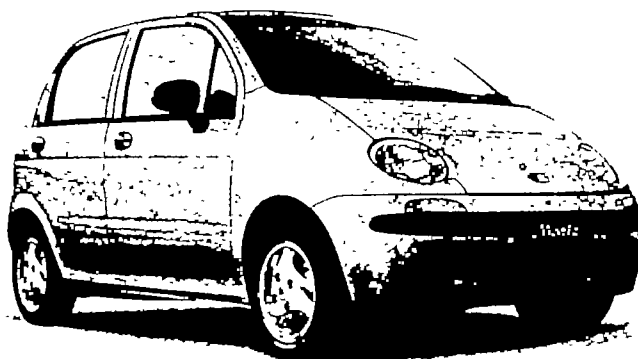


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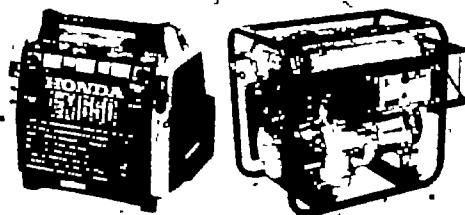
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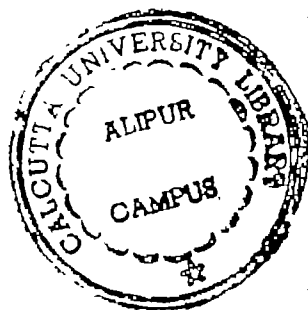
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Designed by Akila Seshasayee

# The problem

INDIA, along with other WHO member-nations, became a signatory to the Alma-Ata declaration promising 'Health for All' by the year 2000 a little over two decades back. The expectation was that with adequate investments in health infrastructure and an appropriate mix of public health strategies, the country would be well-placed to meet this laudable goal. It's a sad commentary on the times that even into the target year, we can at best claim partial success in meeting the goal of a healthy population.

There is no running away from the many achievements over the decades – increased life expectancy, reduced infant mortality, declines in fertility, some success in eradicating basic communicable diseases. More significantly, over the last five decades India, unlike many other Third World nations, has succeeded in setting up a complex medical and health infrastructure involving teaching, training and research, drugs and medical instrument production, and medicare, including at the tertiary level. And yet, as end beneficiaries of the medical and health system, the consumers remain deeply dissatisfied with the services they receive, both in terms of cost and quality.

Some of this is reflected in macro statistics. Life expectancy still hovers below 60, infant mortality rates at 64 per 1000 live births. The percentage of children affected by stunting stands at a high 65, while 27% of

all children suffer wasting. 470 per 100,000 continue to die as a result of communicable diseases and average annual incidence of TB per 100,000 population is a high 220. We have only 0.41 doctors per 1000 population, 0.7 hospital beds and the nurse/doctor ratio remains a low 1.1.

True, some of the above can be explained through an inadequate health expenditure, not unexpected in a poor country. Few, however, realize that private health expenditures are four times the public spending, and together they stand at around 6% of our GDP. Far more serious is the fact that a disproportionately large amount of our health spending remains concentrated in urban, technologically intensive, curative medicare. Even the systems of training, teaching, research or the production of drugs and medical equipment remain directed to serving the better-off sections of the population. Little wonder that disaggregated statistics by class, caste, gender and location present a far more dismal picture.

It is not that the correctives are not known. Even prior to Independence, the Bhore Committee (1946) advocated a focus on preventive health (nutrition and clean drinking water), control of communicable diseases, and the establishment of a rural medicare system. The ICSSR-ICMR Health for All report (1978) reiterated the Bhore recommendations. Dozens of

significant health experiments such as those of K.S. Sanjeevi in Chennai, the Aroles in Jamkhed, Sudarshan in the B.R. Hills of Karnataka, SEWA Rural in Gujarat, the Gonoshaytha Kendra in neighbouring Bangladesh, just to name a few, provide worthwhile proposals/models which we could draw upon.

Each of these experiments have convincingly demonstrated that it is possible to train even unlettered men and women to effectively run the health services, at a fraction of the costs incurred by the health establishment. And yet, while awards have been conferred on these pioneers in plenty, when it comes to formulating policy, these voices remain marginal. What is most depressing has been our inability to even match the Bangladesh Drug Policy which banned all but 150 essential drugs. It's another matter that the policy, like so many well-intentioned measures, was subsequently whittled down. And the pressure came not just from the multinational pharmaceutical industry (which stood to lose markets), but the local medical profession, and even the WHO. Maybe there is a lesson in this.

At least part of our problems can be traced to the equation of medicare to health care, to the wilful abrogation of our rights over our bodies and health to the tribe of medical professionals. Whether or not one goes along with Ivan Illich and the thesis proposed in the

path-breaking *Medical Nemesis*, with doctors being classified as a 'disabling profession' and iatrogenesis being identified as a major cause of ill-health and sickness, there is little doubt that the mystique surrounding the profession (not surprising since the doctor is seen as governing life) has resulted in a medicalization of health, a fixation with intrusive and high technology, and the acceptance a set of standards which downgrade if not rubbish people's abilities to take care of themselves.

It is no one's case that the spectrum of diseases today has not dramatically changed from what it was even a decade back. Industrialization, lifestyle changes and an incursion of global fashions have resulted in not only the new diseases of affluence (hypertension, cardiac problems, cancers) but in irretrievably altering our perceptions of what constitutes good health and treatment. No wonder, given our political economy and iniquitous power structure, our health establishment, such as it is, remains fixated on responding to the problems of the elite. AIDS, as the new global scare, excites greater attention than control of tuberculosis, malaria, kala-azar or water borne diseases.

The previous decade's experience with reforms, including in the health sector, generate a mixed response. Throughout the decade of the '90s, while we have witnessed a proliferation of private medicare

facilities, including the setting up of super-specialty hospitals, the primary and secondary health care system, mainly public, seems to have slipped into a state of terminal decay. If anything, the burgeoning of the private sector, instead of adding to the overall quality and quantity of services available and thereby reducing pressure on an overstretched public system, seems to have further depleted the public health care system, most of all through hiving off trained medical personnel. This has hugely damaged the referral back up for primary and secondary facilities.

The introduction of the new WTO guidelines, both by opening up the domestic drug and instrumentation market for multinational firms and through introducing changes in patent regimes from being process to product based, too has impacted on the consumer. Prices, including those of essential drugs, have touched a new high.

Accompanying this increasing corporatization of health and medicare is the growth of the user-fee ideology, ostensibly advanced by the neo-liberal institutions of the West. Partly, this was to be expected because private providers of medicare demand adequate returns on investment. What is unfortunately inadequately realised is that the emerging system is both technology driven and expensive and for its sustenance demands either state subsidies or a new system of health insurance – a trend which is already visible. Simultaneously, pressure develops on a cash strapped state, afflicted with fiscal deficits and public debt, to cut down expenditures and focus only or primarily on basic health services.

Most critiques of our health sector reforms only bemoan the growing commercialisation of the profession and plead for a substantial expansion of the public system. While there is no gainsaying the need for meeting the WHO recommended target of spending six percent of GDP on public health, a mere 'more of the same' will do little to correct the structural imbalances. We need systems that can ensure openness, transparency, accountability and fairness of the medical establishment – whether public or private.

The current approach, of extending the Consumer Protection Act to the medical profession, is clearly inadequate. For one, it does not cover the doctors in the public hospitals. Given the sorry state of their diagnostic services and record systems, it remains virtually impossible for a patient to question the treatment provided and seek redress. The private practitioners, in seeking to protect themselves from possible tort law cases, have both rushed to secure insurance cover

and hide behind an even more elaborate system of tests prior to treatment. Like in the West, this trend has contributed to a further escalation in costs without in any way strengthening the rights of the patient. What is needed instead is a wide-ranging debate on medical ethics so that the profession can both remain self-governing and approximate the ideals of their Hippocratic oath.

There are at least two other areas that demand urgent attention. The first relates to our continuing obsession with fertility control. This despite the tragic experience of the Emergency, the ICPD Conference in Cairo, even the renaming of the family planning programme as Reproductive and Child Health programme. Whatever our policy-makers may claim about having given up a target-oriented approach and accepted the importance of women's education and empowerment, the Health Ministry's preoccupation remains population control, and that too through intrusive surgical interventions like vasectomy and tubectomy. Gender sensitivity clearly remains only a catchword.

The second issue concerns the upgradation and integration of indigenous, non-allopathic systems of medicine in our overall health policy. Even now, a majority of our populace consults non-allopathic practitioners, though their popularity has been steadily declining. These systems – ayurveda, unani, homeopathy, folk and tribal medicine, yoga – it is claimed are both more holistic in their approach to the patient and generate fewer side-effects in treatment. Countries such as ours need to explore systematically these claims and make use of their insights.

Simultaneous to altering the cognitive power balance between allopathic (modern western) systems and others, we need to correct the growing imbalance between doctors, nurses and paramedics and between general and speciality doctors. The current system of medical education ensures an over-supply of specialists (whatever be their quality) who crowd around urban tertiary service centres. This, while our primary health care system, mainly in rural areas, remains starved of trained personnel. What's more, professional management training for record keeping and data collection has taken precedence over clinical training of field based paramedical workers.

Health for All demands that health care be placed back in the hands of the people. In a democratic system they must remain the final arbiter of their fate. This issue of *Seminar* debates some of these crucial concerns.

# Where are we today?

RAVI DUGGAL

WAY back in 1978, WHO member nations took a pledge at Alma-Ata to ensure not just universal access to primary health care, but 'health for all' by the year 2000.<sup>1</sup> Well, the magical year has arrived, but can we claim that the situation has substantively changed? The countries that had not provided basic health care to their people earlier continue to be unable to do so even today. It is not as if there is a lack of resources – more drugs are produced, the private health sector has grown geometrically, people are spending much more out of pocket, newer technologies are available and so on – but the numbers of those without access to primary health care have increased.

In 1946 we had a well worked out plan and strategy to provide health for all in the form of the Health Survey and Development Committee Report (popularly called the Bhore Committee Report). It was a comprehensive plan that guaranteed universal access to health care 15 years down the line. But the first health minister's conference in 1947 scuttled it, claiming it to be unaffordable. The Bhore

plan required only about 1.33% of GNP, including capital expenditures (or Rs 2.98 per capita at 1945 prices).<sup>2</sup> This was not a difficult target to achieve. It would also have been a fruitful investment in people who would contribute to the new economy.

We opted instead for a selective programme based approach, perhaps under the influence of American community development model which had become the cornerstone of our development policy in the early years of planning. Many of these were vertical programmes that had their own bureaucracy and which, over time, developed into 'empires'. No doubt this approach contributed to some well-known successes, like the eradication of small pox by 1976, control over malaria by the mid '60s (but this was later messed up due to complacency as malaria continues to be a menace), reasonable control over leprosy by mid '80s, and more recently, the pulse polio programme.

However, access to basic health care, especially in the rural areas, remains unavailable to a large majority. This, despite a large expansion of

1. The Alma-Ata declaration defined primary health care as 'essential health care based on practical, scientifically sound and socially acceptable methods and technology made universally accessible to individuals and families in the community through their full participation and at a cost that the community and the country can afford to maintain at every stage

of their development in the spirit of self reliance and self determination.' (WHO, 1978: Alma-Ata 1978 – Primary Health Care, Geneva).

2. GOI, 1946: Health Survey and Development Committee Report, Vol. II, p. 510.

rural health infrastructure in the '70s and '80s under the minimum needs programme. While this infrastructure is in place in many states, it does not meet the health care needs of the people. People need basic curative and preventive care but the existing system is obsessed with providing family planning and related services. From the third five year plan onward, family planning has remained the main concern of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.<sup>3</sup>

**S**ince then, nomenclatures may have changed from maternal and child health to child survival and safe motherhood, and presently reproductive and child health under international patronage, but the underlying emphasis of the health programme remains family planning or population control. As a consequence, even the poor have to seek primary care from private health providers, often from those not qualified in any system of medicine.

Despite the shortcomings we do see improvement in measurable indicators like longevity, infant mortality and crude death rates over the years. But these figures reflect more an improvement in the quality of life of the top 20%, and the concerted efforts in health care in states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Overall, the misery of the bottom half of the population continue. This is adequately reflected in disaggregated figures of these same indicators in the BIMARU states.

3 In fact, in 1966 a UN Advisory Mission strongly advised that, "The directorate (Health) should be relieved from other responsibilities such as maternal and child health and nutrition. It is undoubtedly important for family planning to be integrated with MCH in the field, particularly in view of the "loop" programme, but until the family planning campaign has picked up momentum and made real progress in the states, the Director General concerned should be responsible for family planning only. This recommendation is reinforced by a fear that the programme may be otherwise used in

Health care access and availability in India has a peculiar public-private mix that generates a political economy which makes the health sector purchasing power dependant. This is a contradiction given the fact that the majority do not have the purchasing power even to sustain adequate nutritional requirements. In a country where nearly half the population struggles under severe poverty conditions and another one-half of the remaining manages at a subsistence level, it is tragic that social needs like health and education have to be more often than not bought in the market place.

**T**oday there are over 15,000 hospitals (68% private) with about 900,000 hospital beds (45% private), about 25,000 primary health centres in the country, and a total of over 1,200,000 qualified practitioners (89% private) of all systems of medicine. The skewed rural/urban availability of public health services is well known – 70% hospitals and 85% of hospital beds under the public domain are located in urban/metropolitan areas while 70% of the population lives in the rural and backward areas of the country.

The pattern of distribution of the private health services is not very different. They too tend to concentrate in urban/metropolitan areas – 60% hospitals, 75% of hospital beds and 70% of allopathic doctors are found in urban areas.<sup>4</sup> However, the private health sector is not confined to just

qualified allopathic practitioners. There are nearly twice as many practitioners qualified in various Indian systems of medicine and homoeopathy, and a larger proportion of them (60%) are located in the rural and backward areas, 90% of them also practicing modern medicine.

**H**ence, the private sector definitely has a better penetration in areas where the majority live. Further, because of a complete lack of regulation and control there is another large chunk of practitioners, estimated at about half as many as the qualified, who practice modern medicine without proper qualifications in any system of medicine – again a large majority of them are in rural and backward areas. The entire private health sector operates on a profit basis within the context of a supply induced demand economy. Estimates based on various studies show that private health expenditure accounts for 4 to 6% of the GDP, in sharp contrast to less than 1% of the GDP which the government spends.<sup>5</sup>

In the current scenario of liberalisation and globalisation, the pressure to further reduce state participation in the health sector will be difficult to resist. Even the WHO has diluted its stand and is now in favour of selective health care for a targeted population, an approach which the World Bank has pushed since its 1993 World

ministry of health, state medical councils, the Census of India and utilisation surveys carried out by various institutions like the NSSO, NCAER and others.

5 There are a number of studies which have documented private health expenditures. Some of the important ones are NCAER, 1992: Household Survey of Medical Care, New Delhi; K P Kanan, et al, 1991: Health and Development in Rural Kerala, KSSP, Thiruvananthapuram; R. Duggal, et al, 1989: Cost of Health Care—Survey of an Indian District, FRCH, Bombay; NSSO, 1989: Morbidity and Utilisation of Medical Services—42nd Round, GOI, New Delhi.

Development Report, 'Investing in Health'. WHO's recent report titled 'Health For All in the 21st Century' has debunked the comprehensive approach and is now focusing on selective programmes. The report has also abandoned any concern for equity and social justice. Such is the combined initiative of the WHO and the World Bank. Hence, the challenge has to be at another level – both to strengthen the state's role in the health sector as well as to make the private sector more accountable.

**O**ver the last nine plan periods the Planning Commission, or for that matter the ministry of health, has not paid much heed to the way in which the private health sector has grown and operated. In fact, the state has subsidised the growth of the private health sector by various means – subsidised medical education even for those who ultimately go into private practice or, worse still, migrate abroad; concessions, subsidies and tax reliefs to private practitioners and hospitals. Many private hospitals function as trust hospitals whose incomes are exempt from tax. Public sector units have supplied bulk drugs and raw materials at subsidised prices to the private pharmaceutical industry and have in the process earned the label of 'being in the red' and 'inefficient'. Import duty concessions for expensive new medical technology which largely benefits the richer sections have also been provided.

The new strategy should focus both on strengthening the state sector and at the same time planning for a regulated growth and involvement of the private health sector. There is a need to recognise that the private health sector is huge and has cast its net, irrespective of quality, far wider than the state sector health services. Through regulation and involvement of the

private health sector, an organised public-private mix could be set up to provide universal and comprehensive care to all. The need of the hour is to look at the entire health care system in unison to evolve some sort of a national system. The private and public health care services need to be organised under a common umbrella to serve one and all. A framework for basic minimum level of care needs to be clearly spelt out and this should be accessible to all without direct cost to the patient at the time of receiving care.

We are today at the threshold of another transition which will see some changes in regimes of regulation, price control, quality assurance, rationality in practice and so on. The opening up of private health insurance will bring in new rules of the game, enabling providers to meet their own profit motives. While this may, to an extent, improve quality and accountability, it will be of little help to the poor and underserved who are unlikely to have access to this system. Worldwide experience shows that private insurance only pushes up costs and serves the interests of the 'haves'. If equity in access to basic health care must remain the goal, the state cannot abdicate its responsibility in the social sectors.

**T**hough the state need not become the primary provider of health care services, this does not mean that it has no stake in the health sector. As long as there are poor people, the state will have to remain a significant player. In fact, as the experience of most developed countries demonstrates, the state becomes an even stronger player when the number of poor people declines!<sup>6</sup>

6. Data from OECD countries clearly shows that the state is a major player in health financing and that over three-fourths of the resources for the health sector in these countries, except USA, comes from the public exchequer; even

While a major reorganisation of the health sector will take its own time, certain positive changes are possible within the existing set up through macro policy initiatives. Medical councils must be directed to put their house in order by ensuring that only those qualified and registered practice medicine. Continuing medical education (CME) should become compulsory and linked to renewal of registration. Graduates passing out of public medical schools must put in compulsory public service of at least five years of which three years must be at PHCs and rural hospitals. (This should be assured not through bonds or payments but by providing only a provisional license to do supervised practice in state health care institutions and also by giving the right to pursue postgraduate studies to only those who have completed their three years of rural medical service.)

**T**he spread of private clinics and hospitals must be regulated through a strict locational policy wherein the local authority is given the right to determine the number of doctors or hospital beds they need in their area (norms for family practice, practitioner: population and bed ratio, population ratios, fiscal incentives for remote and underserved areas and strong disincentives and higher taxes for urban and overserved areas, etc., can be used).

The quality of care provided by hospitals and practitioners should be regulated by laying down minimum standards to be followed. A compulsory health insurance for the organised sector employees should be put in place (restructuring the existing ESIs and merging them with the common national health care system where

in the USA it is over 40%. But in India the state contributes only about one-fifth, the balance coming out of the pocket of households.

each employee enjoys equal rights and cover but contributes as per earning capacity). For example, if each employee contributes 2% of earnings and the employer adds another 3% then nearly Rs100 billion could be raised through this scheme alone.

**S**pecial taxes and cesses for health can be levied to generate additional resources (alcohol, cigarettes, property owners, vehicle owners are well-known targets and something like 1% of sales turnover for the products and a value tax on the asset could bring in substantial resources). The allocation of existing resources can be rationalised better through preserving acceptable ratios of salary: nonsalary spending and setting up a referral system for secondary and tertiary care. These are only some examples of what can be done through macro policy initiatives.

There is an urgent need to strengthen, restructure and reorient public health services. The urban bias in medical care provision by the state needs to be corrected. The primary health centres (PHCs) and subcentres (SCs) need to be thoroughly reoriented to meet peoples' needs of medical care and not be obsessed with family planning alone. Facilities for medical care need to be substantially enhanced at the PHCs, both in terms of personnel and supplies.

While supplies can be increased through larger budgetary allocations, it is difficult to get personnel to work in the public system. Since private individual practice remains the norm, it becomes necessary to involve such practitioners to join a public sponsored health care programme on a pre-defined payment system, for instance, a fixed capitation fee per family registered with the practitioner. Such a system needs to be evolved both in the rural and urban areas. This

would mean a five-fold increase in primary care costs which would be partly financed from within the existing resources and the remaining from the organised sectors of the economy, including insurance and special health related taxes.

Of course, this would entail substantial restructuring, including stronger regulations and control and a mechanism for regular audit of the system's functioning. This is the only way of guaranteeing universal access to health care and achieving 'health for all'. The bottom line would be no direct payments by patients at the time of receiving care. All payments would be made through a statutory authority which would be the monopoly buyer. People with a capacity to pay should be charged indirectly through taxes, insurance premia, levies and so on.

**S**uch restructuring would not disturb the autonomy of the individual practitioner or the private hospitals except that it would strive to eliminate irrational and unnecessary practices, demand some relocation of practitioners, standardise and rationalise costs and incomes, eliminate quackery and demand accountability from the providers. The ministry of health at the Centre has shown some interest in these areas and is promoting processes geared in this direction.<sup>7</sup>

The public health sector must be made efficient, cost-effective and socially accountable. The response to the malaise of the public health services should not be to 'privatise'. We already have a large, exploitative and unsustainable private health sector. What makes the private health sector 'popular' in usage is its better access

(irrespective of quality), a personalised interface, availability at convenience, and its non-bureaucratic nature. The public health services by contrast are bureaucratic, with poor access especially in rural areas, have inconvenient timings, are generally impersonal, often don't have requisite supplies like drugs, and are plagued by nepotism and corruption.

**T**here is substantial scope for improvement of public health service with better planning, reallocation of existing resources as well as pumping in additional resources—especially for non-salary expenditures, reducing wastage and improving efficiency by better management practices and separation of primary, secondary and tertiary care through setting up of referral systems, improving working conditions of employees and so on.

One good way of enhancing the value, efficiency and effectiveness of the existing system using available resources is to ensure that all medical graduates who pass out of public medical schools (80% of all graduates every year) serve in the public system for say at least five years with out which they should be denied the licence to practice as well as admission for postgraduate studies. After all the state spends about Rs 1,000,000 per medical graduate!<sup>8</sup> This measure if enacted by law, will itself make available 14,000 doctors of modern medicine every year for the public health care system.

Further, public health services must be made accountable to the local communities they serve. The community must perform both the role of social audit as well as take responsi-

7. The central ministry of health has appointed panels of experts to look into quality of care, systems for accreditation etc. and this is a positive beginning towards development of minimum standards for quality care.

8. This has been estimated from the Maharashtra government's ministry of health budget from the sub-head on teaching hospitals. It is the net cost to the government to train a medical graduate for five years at current prices.



bility for ensuring that the system works properly for the benefit of patients. As regards the private health sector, as mentioned above, there is an urgent need to regulate it, implement minimum standards of care, standardise charges, frame policies for location and distribution and so on. All these are feasible proposals which could be undertaken irrespective of the structural changes suggested in the preceding paragraphs.

**M**odes of financing and payments: While the public sector is funded through tax revenues the private sector relies on fee-for-services. There is a growing trend of thought favouring at least partial user-charges or fee-for-services for public health services. This trend must be countered as in the given socio-economic conditions such a policy would hit the majority hard. The WHO has been firm about nations spending 5% of GDP on health care. In India the state doesn't spend even 1%.

The first effort, therefore, must be to get the state to commit a much larger share for the health sector from existing resources. Additional revenues specifically for health budgets may be collected on the lines of a profession tax in some states which funds employment programmes; levies and cesses for health could be collected by local bodies; employers in the organised sector must be made to contribute for health care services; those with a capacity to pay like organised sector employees, the middle and rich peasantry (so far completely untaxed), and other self-employed, must do so through insurance and other prepayment programmes.

In a vast and varied country like India no single system can work. What we need is a combination of social insurance for the poor (premium paid by the state), employment related insur-

ance for the organised sector employees, voluntary insurance for other categories who can afford to pay, and tax and related revenues. Further, payments at the point of provision of care must be eliminated as they are usually unfavourable to patients. Payments must be made to providers by a monopoly buyer/s of health services who can also command certain standard practices and maintain a minimum quality of care; payments could be made in a variety of ways such as capitation or fixed charges for a standard regimen of services, and fee-for-service as per standardised rates.

**T**he move towards monopoly purchase of health services through insurance or other means and payment to providers through this single channel is a logical and growing global trend. This is perhaps the only alternative available at present to achieve universal access to health care with relative equity. It, of necessity, implies the setting up of an organised system wherein the state plays a leading role while involving the large private sector within this universal health care paradigm.

The above changes, though feasible, are not going to be easy to achieve. The government does not view health care as a major political concern and hence does not see the need for any drastic reforms in the health sector. The private health sector is happy with the government's unconcern about the manner in which it operates. Yet there is hope because pressures are building up from below. The Consumer Protection Act delivered the first shock to the private health sector thereby forcing a realisation that they cannot ride roughshod over their clients. The government too needs to be administered such shock therapy; this we believe may be just round the corner!

# A perspective on reforms

VIMALA RAMACHANDRAN

LISTENING to presentations in an Asia regional meeting on the gender and reproductive health impacts of health sector reforms,<sup>1</sup> one was struck by the similarity of interventions that are currently underway in diverse economic and political systems.

The People's Republic of China with its 50 years of experience with barefoot doctors and an extensive primary health care network and Vietnam with a similar system, were once hailed as *the* model for poor countries. On the other hand, the Philippines and Thailand have leant more towards the private sector. Bangladesh and India, in contrast, have opted for a state

funded primary health care system with an extensive network of primary health centres and sub-centres. China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Bangladesh and India also have a high profile family welfare programme. The Philippines and Pakistan, in contrast, have treaded a more cautious path on contraceptives. Each of the countries in this region has different priorities, problems and political compulsions. Yet the dominant discourse among the HSR gurus in the globalisation era is strikingly similar.

As Bennett and Muraleedharan point out, 'Despite differences in country contexts the proposals for reforming government have common themes. These include a shift away from direct provision of services by

<sup>1</sup> Regional meeting of the Ford Foundation held in Lijiang, Yunnan Province, China, 12-17 March 2000

government towards a stronger role in policy-making, coordinating their actors, regulation, facilitating and providing information... In pursuing these aims governments have used a number of mechanisms, including contracting out of services to private sector providers, the creation of autonomous public organisations, corporatisation of government organisations, reforms of civil service structures, privatisation, decentralisation, consumer charters and a host of other instruments.<sup>2</sup>

User fees have been introduced in hitherto free services and health insurance has become the new *mantra* to offset the negative impact of household expenditure on health care. The general belief is that privatisation, corporatisation, user fees and contracting out services will make the system more efficient and responsive to clients. The government is now called upon to regulate cost and quality, set standards and adopt new management techniques to manage the system. In short, the government is now called upon to act as a referee and step back from service delivery.

**H**as this made a difference? The common refrain across the region is that people's access to basic primary health care has not improved. The cost of medical care has been steadily rising and household expenditure on health care has gone up. This observation by health economists (who, along with health management professionals dominate the HSR field) is invariably followed by a statement that the hidden cost has now become visible.

Researchers point out that private health insurance has not only increased costs but that unnecessary

diagnostic tests are now being conducted. There is growing evidence that appendectomy, caesarean section (CS), hysterectomy, coronary bypass surgery and blood transfusion are on the increase and being done without valid medical indications.<sup>3</sup> While there has been a staggering increase in the number of private hospitals, clinics and nursing homes, the poor are left to cope with a decaying public health delivery system.

**A**nother debate is also sweeping the world – the global movement for reproductive health.<sup>4</sup> From the United States to Guinea-Bissau, from the Caribbean to South Asia, those concerned with women's health are engaged in a movement for reproductive health and reproductive rights. Focusing on a range of demand side issues, this movement has turned the population and family planning world upside down. Women's access to basic health care (not just maternal health and family planning), health care needs throughout their life (life cycle approach), attitude of service providers (who only see them as baby producing machines), male responsibility in sexual health and contraception and the increasing burden of work on women have been the focus of this movement.

On the management side the movement had turned the spotlight on low skill and low status of female paramedical workers who shoulder a disproportionately large burden of service delivery and the burden of home based care shouldered by women (especially of the elderly,

HIV-AIDS patients, mentally ill etc). It almost seems as if the two worlds are speaking a different language.

**T**his schism between women's health advocates and 'mainstream' health economists and management experts is evident throughout the world. The separation of the departments of health and population (family planning) in India, China, Indonesia, and Bangladesh has only legitimised this trend. As a result, the discourse on women's health is conducted in the domain of population stabilisation. This has unfortunately left women with little choice but to wrestle with the population control hawks.

The debate on HSR is anchored in the larger framework of Structural Adjustment Policy, globalisation and the health sector (as distinct from the population and family planning sector). As expected, the latter is conducted in a gender-neutral framework. Health care seekers are 'clients'; their social and economic situation, gender and occupational profile not factored in. Similarly, service providers too are not differentiated, even though a majority of field level and extension workers (mostly paramedical) are women. They are low-skilled, poor and vulnerable, and often burdened with both health care and family planning responsibilities. In India the two worlds – health and family welfare (now known as reproductive and child health) – converge at this level.

The global RH movement has called for the state to assume greater responsibility in meeting women's health needs, containing population growth, the HIV-AIDS pandemic and making people aware of sexually transmitted diseases (especially adolescents and young people). The combination of long term economic impact of population growth and the

2 Sara Bennett and V.R. Muralidharan, 'New Public Management and Health Care in the Third World', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 8 January 2000, pp 59-68

3 Madhukar Pai, Unnecessary Medical Interventions: Caesarian Sections as a Case Study. Paper presented in MFC meeting, December 1999.

4 This movement gained momentum at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo.

HIV-AIDS pandemic has propelled this movement. On the other hand, the HSR pundits argue for greater privatisation and want to absolve the state of its responsibility for providing basic health care.

The Regional Ford Foundation meeting assumes importance in this context. There are two important streams pushing for reforms within the health delivery system across the world. There are two powerful lobbies backed by the World Bank, major bilateral and multilateral donors and international foundations. Yet, for all practical purposes the two have remained distinct with little linkage between the two worlds.

**R**ecent evidence from countries like China – especially in the era of a one-child family – show that women now assume the responsibility for two sets of parents. The pandemic of HIV-AIDS has thrown up a similar situation. Evidence from Africa and Asia indicate that women have to shoulder the added responsibility of caring for terminally ill people. Similarly, the gender impact of the DOTS regime for tuberculosis treatment is rarely acknowledged.

The experience in India suggests that access to continued medication (after the overt symptoms disappear) is determined by women's status and bargaining power within the family. The design and construction of maternal health centres or public health clinics also reveal a lack of sensitivity towards privacy (audio and visual) during medical examination. Waiting rooms are rarely provided with toilets. The ability of women suffering from TB to take oral or injectible contraceptives is not factored into the FP programme. Similarly, an increase in abortion rates across the country and the unfortunate trend toward sex selective abortion have added to

women's health burden – making women weaker and thus more susceptible to other infections.

**I**t is indeed ironic that while the two worlds criss-cross and meet in the lives of women, formal institutions involved in HSR and RH are more concerned about retaining their turf and identity. This unfortunate division is best illustrated in India's experience with reproductive health in a system that is geared for immunisation and disease control on the one hand and population control on the other. Recent HealthWatch studies<sup>5</sup> on the implementation of the new approach reveal that there are systemic barriers to implementation of the integrated reproductive and child health programme. What are these systemic barriers?

- \* The sub-centres, which are the field units and the headquarters of auxiliary nurse and midwives are under-equipped and often are little more than a physical space. Over the years training for collection of data and maintenance of records has been given more importance than clinical training. As a result ANMs, who shoulder the primary responsibility of extension work, are not only under-skilled, but also overworked and disempowered. Workers at higher levels lord over them. For example, the dying cadre of male multipurpose workers have almost no significant responsibility. Neither the ANM nor the male-MPW can handle infectious diseases (except for children through ORT), accidents and complicated pregnancies. They can at best refer people to the PHC.

- \* The primary health centre is another neglected unit of the health care deli-

very system. The infrastructure is bad (despite repeated grants for construction under various foreign aided projects<sup>6</sup>), there is no running water or sanitation, electricity supply is unreliable and in many parts of the country not even a doctor! Lack of transparency in construction and maintenance of public buildings and the prevalent culture of corruption only exacerbates the problem. The prevailing system of medical education and training does not positively encourage doctors to work in rural areas,<sup>7</sup> resulting in an oversupply in urban areas. The government has no plan to rectify this imbalance (unlike China that has a range from the bare-foot doctor to full-fledged specialists).

- \* Appropriate drugs and equipment are rarely available where most needed – i.e. in rural areas and urban slums. The logistics and supply of essential drugs is inefficient and corrupt.

- \* The attitude of service providers down the line remains a problem – women continue to be viewed as perpetrators of the population problem. There is little concern for the dignity and privacy of women. The quality of care is poor. The range of services available is also limited to immunisation, pregnancy registration (not care) and sterilisation. As a result, women stay away from government services for abortion and contraception.

- \* The impact of the separation of health from family planning can be felt right up to the PHC level. The schedule for immunisation, maternal health and family planning services do not match with services (where available) for tuberculosis, leprosy,

6. For example, in Rajasthan almost every PHC and sub-centre were built and rebuilt under World Bank and UNFPA funded projects over the last 15 to 20 years. These grants were channelled through the PWD. Even a casual visitor to a PHC cannot miss the state of neglect.

7. Recently, Tamil Nadu has made postgraduate admissions easy for doctors who have served in a rural PHC for at least three years.

5. HealthWatch Trust, The Community Needs-Based Reproductive and Child Health in India – Progress and Constraints. October 1999. See overview of main findings by Leela Visaria and Vimala Ramachandran.

malaria etc. Women have little access to non MCH-FP services. Over the years the campaign mode of delivery of immunisation and seasonal sterilisation camps have effectively undervalued routine and sustained service delivery throughout the year. The former is more visible and can be 'monitored'.

\*The functioning of referral units providing MCH services, treatment for sexually transmitted diseases, complicated pregnancies and abortions leaves much to be desired. Most district hospitals have become overcrowded and inefficient. Without reliable back-up services, the ANMs and even the medical officer at the PHC do not feel confident to refer patients.

**I**n short, in most parts of the country the health care delivery system does not work, thereby reducing the chances of success of the recently introduced RCH programme. Service providers admit that radical reforms are called for. Yet, these changes are not really woven into the health sector reforms strategy.

Is it not logical that a health sector reform programme should ideally look at barriers to the implementation of government programmes and projects – reproductive and child health, tuberculosis control, HIV and AIDS, leprosy, among others?

Unfortunately, HSR – as we know it in India – is more about macro policy changes related to contracting out services and formation of corporations and autonomous bodies. What has been initiated so far? The government has primarily experimented with contracting out services for laundry, hospital food, cleaning etc. There is talk about health insurance, community based group insurance linked to savings and credit, opening the insurance business to MNCs and so on.

With the exception of a corporation for the supply of drugs in Tamil Nadu, we have made little progress in this area. Health sector reforms are today limited to insurance, privatisation and user fee. Even the quality of care issue raised in the reproductive health programme has not found its way into HSR! Will the two streams ever meet?

**M**aybe there is another way of looking at HSR in India. From the perspective of poor women and men and the thousands of under-skilled and disempowered service providers, HSR should take a worm's eye view and not a bird's eye view of the systemic changes that are necessary to make the system work.

Perhaps HSR should start with medical education and training. If the mainstay of our health delivery system is the paramedical worker, then enhancing clinical and diagnostic skills of ANMs, male-MPW, lab assistants, etc. should logically be a priority. Higher skills could lead to greater self-confidence, community acceptance and effectiveness. This might turn the system around and make it more service oriented. Why has India shied away from a shorter duration medical education programme for midwives and frontline medical workers? If we cannot get doctors to serve in rural areas, maybe the only way out is to create another cadre.

Similarly, recognising the importance of enhancing the clinical skills of traditional birth attendants (*dais*), especially in states like Rajasthan where the proportion of institutional deliveries is abysmally low (and not likely to increase in the near future) could be the only way to reduce infant and maternal mortality. Unfortunately, Unicef has lobbied for cent percent institutional deliveries; as a result the TBA training programme has lost

its importance. From a 40-day training programme in the 1960s in India, we now have a token three day course to teach TBA about the Five Cleans! While the intentions of this advocacy programme may be laudable, the situation on the ground is far from ideal. With the exception of forward states, women continue to depend on family members, local midwives and others.

For almost 40 years India's health and family welfare programme has been overshadowed by demographers, resulting in lopsided priorities. As of now a large proportion of the time of service providers, from the medical officer downward, is spent filling forms and compiling data. This has also eaten into valuable in-service training time. Separating the service delivery functions of the system from data gathering functions could provide a major breakthrough. Service providers must be liberated from the responsibility of demographic data collection and cumbersome reporting through complicated formats to concentrate on service provision.

**I**nfrastructure development has become synonymous with corruption and rake-offs. Inviting community participation and private cooperation for construction and maintenance, from the sub-centre upwards, could be encouraged on a large scale. A meaningful partnership through a representative committee at the functional level would not only enhance the quality of service but also break the influence of contractors. Involving women at the design and planning stage could take care of issues of privacy, toilets and other facilities. The experience of Tamil Nadu (see Leela Visaria's paper in this issue) has been encouraging.

Similarly, creating a drug bank through public contribution, setting up a more transparent drug supply corporation with greater freedom at the

functional level to order and scrutinise the quality of drugs, could be explored. This has been tried out in Tamil Nadu with some encouraging results.<sup>8</sup>

Changing attitudes is not easy anywhere in the world and India is no exception. A tight monitoring system for essential quality of care indicators (including privacy and dignity), service availability and service provision indicators could force some change in the way women and indeed the poor are treated in our health delivery system. Involving panchayati raj institutions, local women's groups and other consumer protection groups in surprise inspection of quality of services, or gram sabha meetings to discuss quality and availability of services could be introduced. This may enhance accountability and in the process make service providers more cautious.

Finally, the question of user fee and payment for services could be resolved after public discussion. Linking user fee to monitoring by the panchayat and gram sabha, and introducing some degree of flexibility to fix charges (with a stipulated ceiling) could be explored. A national policy or a state-wide office order introducing user fee in the absence of a corresponding monitoring system may be counterproductive.

Essentially, what the region needs is a more people-centred health sector reform and not economist or demographer driven restructuring programmes. Macro managerial solutions that seem to prevail across different countries and even different social sectors may well be irrelevant and not work. Evidence from the region suggests that so far health sector reforms have done little else than make health care expensive and unaffordable for the poorest of the poor.

8. Sara Bennett and V.R. Muralidharan, *op cit*.

## End of drug control?

ANANT PHADKE

IT is rarely realised that patients as consumers of medicare experience a specific vulnerability. During illness, patients are physically and psychologically stressed and hence anxious to get relief. As a result, they are far less critical and choosy about the medicines they buy. Moreover, it is the doctor who decides which and how much medicine the patient should buy. Unlike the advice of an architect when building a house, or that of a mechanic for buying a mechanical gadget, the doctor's advice is binding on the patient, since prescribed medicines are considered essential for relief. Given this peculiar vulnerability and the fact that medicines often involve

issues of life and death, it is imperative that the production, quality, sale and use of medicine be socially controlled for the benefit of patients.

**T**his is especially true in the context of a consumerist culture ('there is a pill for every ill'), and the track record of the drug industry worldwide of pushing unnecessary, ineffective, obsolete and even hazardous drugs and their combinations. While controlling the production of drugs, apart from the direct interests of the patient, national self-reliance too must be kept in view. This is because multinational drug companies through monopolistic practices, have established a hold over key sectors of the drug industry in the Third World to earn extortionate profits.

In this paper, the term drug control is used to mean control over the production of drugs in a scientific, pro-people way. I examine the experience in this field post 'liberalization' (read market anarchy) in the decade of the nineties as also elucidate measures needed for an effective, pro-people drug policy and locate 'decontrol' and 'liberalization' in the context of this framework.

It is no secret that the structure of the drug industry in India is monopolistic and has been dominated by MNCs. This has had an adverse effect both on the consumer and on national self-reliance. The All India Drug Action Network (AIDAN), the coordinating body of various drug action groups in India, therefore, demanded increased control over the drug industry. Since companies tend to restrict the production of 'essential' drugs (as profits are controlled on such items), quotas should be imposed for the production of essential medicines. Second, monopolies have to be restricted by reserving certain drugs for the non-monopoly sector. Unfortunately, with

the advent of a 'liberalized' approach, the government has gradually reduced restrictions on the industry. For example, 82 drugs were delicensed in 1984 and another 12 in 1985 before the New Drug Policy (NDP) was announced in 1986. Delicensing enabled big companies, especially the MNCs, to establish a monopoly by entering into the marketing of these drugs. MNCs tend to import drugs from their parent company rather than produce them in India.

**A**s a result of delicensing and import liberalisation, drugs are both imported more freely and sold more aggressively. For instance, the import of Ibuprofen by Boots, an MNC, increased from Rs 40 million in 1980-81 to Rs 620 million in 1984-85, but its production during the same period only went up from Rs 200 million to Rs 510 million. Seven other MNCs followed a similar route. It eroded our self-reliance and also increased the deficit in foreign trade. This notwithstanding the fact that Indian companies had the capability of producing 22 of the 94 delicensed drugs.<sup>1</sup>

The new regime that came to power under the leadership of Rajiv Gandhi raised the exemption limit for companies for registration under MRTP (Monopolies Restrictive Trade Practices) Act to an annual sales turnover of Rs 1000 million. As a result, none of the pharmaceutical corporations came under the purview of the MRTP Act. As for companies under FERA (Foreign Exchange and Regulation Act), all foreign companies, except two, were now legally Indian companies, due to loopholes and a liberal interpretation of the act. The management of all these ex-

FERA 'Indian' companies, however, remained under foreign control.

**T**he long awaited NDP (National Drug Policy) announced on 18 December 1986, bypassed Parliament and consisted of a press statement of only 1500 words. In response to criticism, the government later published a short 20-page policy document. Not surprisingly, these series of measures were retrogressive, pro-industry and MNC.<sup>2</sup> The NDP totally neglected the health aspect of the drug policy by focusing only production and pricing policy. Moreover, it removed restrictions on foreign companies in the production of new bulk drugs and exports; drugs like penicillin, amoxycillin, cephalixin were no more reserved for the public sector. Further, 31 groups of drugs were included in 'broad banding', i.e. if a MNC was allowed to produce, say, penicillin, it could manufacture all types of penicillins, as well as chemically similar drugs like amoxycillin and ampicillin. The NDP was followed by a new Drug Price Control Order (DPCO).

Subsequent modifications in the drug policy announced in September 1994 and the consequent DPCO in 1995 moved further in the direction of removing controls and leaving the consumer at the mercy of drug companies. The number of price controlled drugs was reduced from 142 to 73; the number of drugs reserved for the public sector was further reduced, and 51% foreign equity was automatically allowed in all sectors of bulk drug production. This was despite the fact that drug companies already earned huge profits. For example, during the first half of 1993-94, major drug companies increased their sales by 31.9% and earned a profit of 348%, which

1. R. S. Anant, 'The New Drug Price Control Order - A Mockery of Democracy', *Medico Friend Circle Bulletin*, October-November 1987, pp. 8-10.

2. R. S. Anant, *Ibid*

was an increase of 84.1% over the previous years profits.<sup>3</sup>

**A** second crucial step involved a loosening of price controls. According to the NDP of December 1986, there were to be only two instead of three categories of drugs placed under price control. Category I included 27 (not all) drugs used in the national health programmes and Category II included another 139 essential drugs. Thus, instead of 343 drugs being placed under price control according to the 1977 DPCO guidelines, only 166 drugs were now under price control. The mark-up (maximum allowable post manufacturing expense – MAPE) for Categories I and II was increased from 40% and 55% to 75% and 100% respectively.

The government further obliged the drug companies in 1995. It declared that henceforth price control would only be applicable in the case of drugs with an annual turnover of more than Rs 4 crore and for only those drugs in case of which there is monopoly/oligopoly. This reduced the basket of price controlled drugs from 166 to 70. Second, the mark-up for all these 70 drugs was uniformly set at 100%, resulting in another round of price increases.

Added to the burgeoning profits for manufacturers was an increased margin for chemists and druggists. In January 1996, the margin for wholesale and retail was raised to 10 and 20% respectively compared to 8 and 11% respectively earlier. In other sectors, the wholesaler's margin was around 3%. Thus, the drug industry and trade together could now liberally fleece patients. It is no surprise that adequate drug treatment remains

Drug type as per system affected by drug	No. of branded formulations studied	Price rise during 1980 and 1995 (%)
Ailimentary System	75	242.84
Cardiovascular System	60	145.34
Central Nervous System	87	199.64
Musculo Skeletal System	18	207.07
Hormones	56	220.67
Genito Urinary System	39	135.24
Infections and Infestation	137	64.21
Nutrition	119	235.83
Respiratory System	47	258.45
Ear, Nose and Oropharynx	22	143.19
Anti-allergic Drugs	19	258.58
Skin	44	194.96
Others	22	335.61
Total	745	191.55

Note: This summary table was prepared in collaboration with Vishwas Rane

beyond the reach of a majority of India's population. Even the middle class has felt the pinch of an unprecedented rise in the price of one drug after another in a continuous, step-wise fashion. The government, with its new faith in market mechanisms, has looked the other way at spiralling drug prices. The 'ceiling prices' decided by the government remain on paper. For example, in September 1995, the prices of popular brands of paracetamol were 11.55 to 65.77% higher than the fixed ceiling price. In the case of aspirin, brand prices exceeded ceiling prices by 200 to 483%, but the government did nothing about it.

Companies have employed various subterfuges to bypass price controls. The first is through making available a drug combination involving a drug which is not under price control and thereby claiming exemption. Second, they market formulations with different strengths and thereby bypass the price control order. Thus for example, where the price of aspirin-300mg was fixed by the government at Rs 0.64 for 10 tablets, that

of aspirin-50mg was kept by German Remedies at a ridiculously high level of Rs 6 for 10 tablets. So the drug company had the temerity to sell the same drug with one-sixth strength at more than nine times the ceiling price! This made a mockery of so-called rational pricing. The government continued its policy of non-intervention even in the case of essential drugs supposedly under price control. The drug companies in India never had it so good!<sup>4</sup>

The rising price of drugs during 1980-95, a period which saw the government liberalize price controls has been analysed by Vishwas Rane.<sup>5</sup> A comparison was made of the price of all categories of drugs as given in the June 1980 and April 1995 issues of the *Monthly Index of Medical Specialties (MIMS)*, which lists in brief the content, use and price of the leading brands in the market. Rane compared the prices of unit package of the brands

4 Vishwas Rane, 'Drug Prices Sharp Rise After Decontrol', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 25 November 1995, pp. 2977-80

5 Vishwas Rane, 'Analysis of Drug Prices, 1980 to 1995', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 24-31 August 1996, pp. 2331-35

26 3. Amit Sengupta, 'New Drug Policy – Prescription for Mortgaging Drug Industry', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 24 September 1994, pp. 2526-33.



listed in the above two issues of *MIMS*. The results (Table 1) show that for the 745 branded formulations studied, there was a price rise of 191% during the June 1980 to April 1995 period, whereas the price index for clothing and footwear, comparable consumer goods of industrial origin, increased by 170% during the same period.

It may be noted that once the monopoly enjoyed by the initial producer broke down, there was a fall in the price of new drugs. The table includes such drugs as well. Thus, actual price rise in the case of older drugs was much higher than what is reflected in the table. Prices continued to rise rapidly during the period April 1998 to April 1999, viz, anti hypertensives 5 to 95.1%, diuretics 15 to 24.6%, and hormones 9 to 23%.<sup>6</sup>

**M**ore than 1500 effective and relatively safe drugs are included in medical textbooks. Of these, the WHO lists around 300 drugs as 'essential' for developing countries. Of these, only 10-15 are needed by the village/community health worker, 27 by the nurse-paramedic for first contact care in village/community level work, and another 100 by doctors at the primary health centre level. Of the 1500 rational drugs, only 35 are in the form of 'fixed dose combinations' (FDCs), i.e. composite mixture of two or more drugs, since such composite mixtures are essential to increase efficiency, reduce side-effects and improve compliance by the patients (eg: iron salt plus folic acid to treat anemia, glucose plus salt plus soda bicarb plus potassium salt to prepare oral rehydration solution to treat dehydration in diarrhoea).

25 of these FDCs are part of the ED list. However, hundreds of irra-

tional fixed dose combinations are manufactured and sold under thousands of brand names in India. Most of these irrational FDCs consist of one necessary and other unnecessary, ineffective, obsolete or hazardous ingredients. Studies which have examined the rationality of these FDCs in drugs like cough mixtures, tonics, antidiarrhoeals and so on, show that an overwhelming majority of them are irrational.<sup>7</sup>

**T**hese irrational mixtures not only jack up the price, but expose the patient to unnecessary medication and side effects. Also it becomes difficult for the food and drug administration to monitor the quality of such drug mixtures, given the additional workload involved in testing extra ingredients. Our economy cannot afford such a waste of limited resources. The AIDAN has therefore demanded that only the FDCs, or drug mixtures recommended by the standard medical textbooks, be permitted and the rest banned. But this demand has not been accepted.

The Drugs Consultative Committee (DCC) is a statutory body which advises the government on drug policy matters. The Drugs Technical Advisory Board (DTAB), a sub-committee of the DCC, advises the government on banning irrational hazardous drugs. The DTAB, how-

ever, meets infrequently. Second, its approach to the weeding out of irrational and hazardous drugs is such that it would take a century to ban all irrational drugs. Instead of deciding on a broad criteria applicable for different drug categories (for example, banning all combinations of vitamins and minerals with iron except folic acid) – it considers every sub-category or each drug separately. Since there are hundreds of such sub-categories and drug combinations, the DTAB could take forever to ban all irrational drugs.

**T**he companies present voluminous material in support of each of these irrational formulations such that the process of banning proceeds at a snail's pace. The AIDAN exerted pressure to expedite the process as a result of which three new members were inducted into the DTAB. This was the result of a Supreme Court decision in a case initiated by a constituent of AIDAN, The Drug Action Forum Karnataka (DAF-K), in November 1994. Consequently, 15 more categories of irrational drugs were banned in the last five years. Nevertheless, as the basic approach of DTAB remains unchanged, the process continues to be inordinately slow

In all, about 68 irrational drugs/combinations have been banned since 1983 due to public pressure. However, compared with the ban on 1900 drugs in Sri Lanka in the 1960s, 1700 drugs in Bangladesh in 1978, 12500 brands in Mozambique within five years of the revolution, this achievement remains somewhat limited. The claim that market mechanisms would cor-

*Service*, October-November 1985, pp. 30-42. Anant Phadke and Deepak Deshpande. 'A Review of Haematonics Marketed in India'. *Drug Disease Doctor* 28, 1992, pp. 88-92. Jamie Uhrig and Penny Dawson, *A Rationality Study of Analgesics and Antipyretics*. Medico Friend Circle, Pune, 1985

6 Vishwas Rane, 'Continuing Rise in Drug Prices', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 24 July 1999, pp 2058-59

7 S V. Desai, 'Anaemia and Oral Haematonic Preparations', *Drug Diseases Doctor* 3(2), 1990, pp 17-20, S.V. Desai and R.S. Desai, 'Rational Cough Mixtures: Analysis of Proprietary Preparations', *Bulletin of Society for Rational Therapy* 3(5), 1991; Kamala Jayarao, 'Tonics – How Much an Economic Waste', in Ashwin Patel (ed), *In Search of Diagnosis*, Medico Friend Circle, Pune, 1977; Kamala Jayarao, 'Allo-Ayurvedopathy, a Non-Scientific Hybridization', *Medico Friend Circle Bulletin*, January-February 1982, pp 5-6; Shishir Modak, *Rationality Analysis of Anti-diarrhoeal Preparations*, Medico Friend Circle, Pune, 1985, Anant Phadke, 'Scientific Scrutiny of Over the Counter Drugs', *Medical*

TABLE 2

Comparison of Drug Prices in India and Pakistan (June 1998)					
Drug and Dosage	Pack	Brand/Company	Price in India (Rs)	Brand/Company	Price in Pakistan (Rs)
<i>Anti-infectives</i>					
Ciprofloxacin 500 mg	10's	Ciprolet/Dr Reddys	39.60	Ciproxin/Bayer	506.58
Norfloxacin 400 mg	10's	Norspan/Bluecross	20.55	Noroxin/MSD	116.53
<i>Anti-inflammatory</i>					
Diclofenac 50 mg	10's	Jonac/G. Remedies	5.64	Voltaren/Ciba	56.74
Piroxicam 20 mg	10's	Dolonex/Pfizer	24.64	Feldene/Pfizer	78.30
<i>Anti-ulcerants</i>					
Ranitidine 150 mg	10's	Zinetac/Glaxo	7.16	Zantac/Glaxo	122.16
Famotidine 40 mg	14's	Topcid/Torrent	9.14	Pepcidine/MSD	370.64
<i>Cardiovasculars</i>					
Atenolol 50 mg	14's	Tenormin/ICI	29.24	Tenormin/ICI	120.60
Diltiazem 60 mg	10's	Dilzem/Torrent	37.50	Herbeser/Tanabe	75.66

rect the distortions is belied by the experience of decontrol of the Indian drug industry.

The Indian Patent Act 1970 was a milestone in India's march towards self-reliance in the field of drug production. It allowed Indian drug companies to produce a drug invented by any MNC if the Indian company was able to do so through a different chemical or engineering process. The IPA 1970 adopted a policy of 'process patents' instead of the earlier policy of 'product-patents'. Thanks to this process patent regime, Indian drug companies started manufacturing many drugs previously monopolized by MNCs, thereby curtailing monopoly pricing. Overall, drug prices in India were considerably lower in comparison to those prevailing in comparable countries like Pakistan which persisted with the old 'product patent' regime favourable to the MNCs. This difference in drug prices is illustrated in Table 2.<sup>8</sup>

The GATT proposals, however, recommended a shift back to the

product-patent regime. There was popular opposition to this proposal, including from sections of the Indian drug industry. All this did was to postpone the government's decision to accept the new patent regime pushed by the WTO which included product patents. This regime will re-establish the domination of the MNCs as regards the production of drugs invented henceforth; it would not affect the existing drugs.

But over a period of time, with the advent of new and better drugs, many existing ones will become obsolete. These new drugs will remain out of reach of ordinary Indians because of high pricing by MNCs. Second, over time, the Indian drug industry will once again come to be dominated by MNCs.

The brave talk of Indian drug companies taking on the 'challenges and opportunities' of the new patent regime is baseless since the development of new drugs is a costly, high-tech affair and the chances of Indian companies successfully competing with the MNCs are virtually nil. It thus comes as no surprise that some of the biggest Indian companies have joined hands with the MNCs to become their junior partners.

8. B.K. Keayla, *Conquest by Patents: TRIPs Agreement on Patent Laws: Impact on Pharmaceuticals and Health for All*. Centre for Study of Global Trade System and Development, New Delhi.



# Privatisation and corporatisation

RAMA V BARU

HEALTH care in India has undergone significant structural changes in recent years with the increasing involvement of the corporate sector. While private health care, in the form of small and medium enterprises like nursing homes, has been prevalent in India for several decades, the entry of the corporate sector is relatively new. This phenomenon has triggered changes in other areas such as medical equipment import policy and health insurance. These trends will clearly have an impact on the struc-

tures of health care provisioning, both in the public and private sectors, redefine consumer perceptions of what constitutes good quality care and alter preferences in terms of services desired. The already prevalent bias in favour of curative care as against a more holistic public health perspective will get further accentuated.

Private health care services in the country have grown and diversified during the last two decades. These consist of a range of players who provide services in both rural and urban

areas. They include individual private practitioners who provide primary level care, owners of small and medium nursing homes who mainly provide secondary care and a few large corporate hospitals that provide tertiary level care. Apart from the growth of private sector in provisioning medicine, the pharmaceutical, insurance, equipment and computer software corporations have become important players in the health sector.

**A**ny analysis of privatisation of the health sector would be incomplete if it did not include the impact of this development on the public sector. The decade of the '90s saw several state governments restructure their secondary level hospitals with loans from the World Bank. This project is being implemented in Punjab, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Orissa under the aegis of the Bank's state health systems project. As a part of the restructuring exercise, a considerable amount of money has been invested in renovation of buildings, purchase of equipment and supply of strip packaged drugs. The restructuring exercise also involves the introduction of user fees as a source of revenue to finance the secondary level hospitals.

This paper looks at the process of privatisation by studying the entry of market forces into the provisioning of medical care in relation to the rise of pharmaceutical, medical equipment, health insurance and computer software corporations. The emerging shifts in the public sector are examined against the backdrop of changes in the private sector in health care since all the major players are inter-related with it at several levels.

While equipment and pharmaceutical corporations were active as suppliers of drugs and equipment to the public sector in the past, it is only

during the latter part of the '90s that they have become partners in the promotion of tertiary, specialist hospitals along with health insurance and software corporations. These corporations sell their products not just to the private sector but also to public hospitals.

Though the late '80s witnessed a significant growth of the corporate sector, the distribution of the private sector across states remains uneven. A bulk of the private sector consists of individual practitioners, both trained and untrained, followed by nursing homes and hospitals which are owned by a single owner or in partnership. Private practitioners, in both rural and urban areas, nursing homes and hospitals are mainly located in urban areas. A few studies have looked at the background of some of these practitioners. The findings reveal that they are normally from the communities in which they live and have spent some time with compounders to pick up the necessary skills for practice. This category also includes practitioners trained in the indigenous systems and homeopathy. There seems to be an extensive referral network between the private practitioners, chemist shops, specialists, nursing homes and even large hospitals.

**T**he growth of the private sector is uneven across states with some like Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Punjab, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu having a higher number of beds compared to the public sector. Between 1970 to 1990 there has been a steady accretion to total bed strength in the private sector. In 1973 private beds constituted 22.3% of total bed strength which rose to 28.9% during the early '80s and accounted for 37% of the total in the early '90s. The under-reporting of private institutions and bed strength is well known and

hence the proportion of private beds to total bed strength may in fact be higher.

**D**uring the late '80s a majority of the hospitals and nursing homes had a bed strength ranging from 5-100 beds. Located in urban areas these facilities were owned by doctors in single owner or partnership enterprises. In some states the smaller enterprises had spread to towns and even villages. A majority of hospitals during the late '80s had a bed capacity of less than 25 with an average of 10 beds. Only 7% of such hospitals had a bed capacity of 75 or more.<sup>1</sup> The hospitals and hospital beds in the private sector are skewed towards urban areas which accounted for 65%, the remaining 35% being in rural areas.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the larger enterprises form only a small proportion and are mainly registered as private limited companies, public limited companies or as trusts. They provide tertiary level specialist care and their scale of operation is much higher than in the case of smaller enterprises. An earlier study that had explored the social background of owners of private hospitals in Hyderabad, revealed that the promoters of small and medium nursing homes were from upper caste backgrounds and a majority of them belonged to families of traders, cultivators and professionals. Among the private and public limited hospitals the owners belonged to the rich peasant and landlord classes, many of whom had links with non-resident Indian doctors based in the US or had worked abroad. These larger enterprises offer specialist services which

1. Ramesh Bhat, *Private Health Care in India: The Public/Private Mix in Health Care in India*, International Health Policy Program, Washington D.C., 1995

2. Ibid.

are dependant on high technology medical equipment.

**T**he growth in imports of medical technology has made health care a profitable business venture. Since the late '80s, there has been a steady increase in the import of medical equipment. Data on the value of imports for a variety of medical equipment and radiological apparatus shows a steady increase from the mid '70s to the early '80s. There was a steep increase during the mid '80s coinciding with official policy to liberalise import of equipment as an incentive to the private sector. While there was a slump in imports during the early '90s, there was a gradual recovery from 1993 and a sharp increase during 1996-97. The 1997-98 budget further slashed import duties and this only encouraged increased import of medical equipment.

During 1998, several multinational corporations like Dickinson, Siemens and Philips set up units for the manufacture of medical equipment ranging from syringes to ultrasounds and scanners. Several multinational companies either collaborated with their Indian counterparts or relocated some of their operations for assembling equipment. This trend was earlier observed in the pharmaceutical industry in Hyderabad. Due to the absence of a public sector in the manufacture of medical equipment, India has relied on imports, which have increased over the years. The '90s saw a growth of the small scale sector alongside larger units for production of medical equipment. With an increase in imports there was no system for registering or regulating this sub sector. The only conditionality imposed by the government on private hospitals importing medical equipment was that they offer a certain percentage of their services free of cost to the poor.

The first corporate hospital in India was set up at Chennai in 1987 by the Apollo group. This venture was the first of its kind in the country since all other large, speciality hospitals in Mumbai and other cities were essentially promoted as trusts. Historically, big business groups had established hospitals as trusts or societies and not as corporate entities. This was mainly because companies funding charitable trusts could secure tax exemptions while being seen as contributing to welfare. The Tata group and the Hinduja brothers had established hospitals in Mumbai, and more recently the Modis, Nandas, Goenkas, Singhanias, Chabbarias and Oberois have also invested in the health care business.

**A**part from the big business houses, several regional business groups in the southern states of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka have also entered the health care market. All these hospitals are multi-speciality institutions and essentially offer tertiary care. Most of the corporate hospitals in the three southern cities of Hyderabad, Bangalore and Chennai are promoted by local doctor entrepreneurs in collaboration with non-resident Indian doctors. The establishment of Apollo marked the entry of non-resident Indian doctors into medical care and signalled a recognition of a hospital as a corporate enterprise. This generated pressure from the private sector in favour of government subsidies for such enterprises in the form of subsidised sale of government land and duty-free import of medical equipment. It marked a change in the organisational form of private investment in health care, the shift taking place from single owner enterprises and nursing homes to corporate enterprises.

Among the corporate hospitals, the Apollo group promoted by Pratap C. Reddy during the late '80s, has emerged as the largest private health care corporation in Asia. At present it manages hospitals with a total bed strength of 2600 in Chennai, Hyderabad, New Delhi, Ahmedabad and Baroda. Apart from investments in hospitals, the group runs hotels and the Indian Hospitals Corporation which is a consulting firm for designing, constructing and professionally managing hospitals. In December 1999, the company decided to merge all its subsidiary and related companies in order to expand operations by mobilising capital from European, American and Japanese medical manufacturers to finance new ventures. The group needs this large financial input in order to promote hospitals in Bangladesh and the Middle East.

**T**he approval to the Insurance Bill by the Lok Sabha has provided further impetus for privatisation. The promoter of Apollo hospitals in an interview opined that the recently liberalised health insurance sector will be the engine of growth for health care in India (*The Hindu*, Delhi, 16 December 1999). His vision for the future of this group includes setting up of satellite clinics, medium sized hospitals in order to bridge the gap between primary and secondary care, a network of diagnostic centres and the provision of telemedicine services. Escorts, another health care company, has expanded its operations, though the scale of its operation is smaller than that of Apollo. It too has promoted the idea of satellite clinics and mobile clinics in rural areas in order to screen patients for cardiac problems.

Apart from providing medical care, some of these corporate hospitals have diversified into medical and

paramedical education and the training of hospital administrators. However, no standards have been followed in setting up these institutions and there is need for a clear cut policy direction with regard to this development.

The experience of corporatisation does not offer a picture of unmitigated success. Some promoters of corporate hospitals have faced financial problems and are unable to keep pace with the rising cost of care provision. As the promoter of Malar Hospitals in Chennai pointed out, 'Managing a corporate hospital is not a viable proposition especially in view of the high cost of equipment and manpower.' Hence, even corporate hospitals have sought government subsidies for financial viability. This demand appears excessive given the fact that the government already offers a number of financial concessions to corporate hospitals in the form of subsidised sale of land, reduced import duties and tax concessions for medical research.

The government has laid down some conditions for providing subsidies which require hospitals to treat a certain percentage of both out patients and in patients free of cost. During the last two years the Delhi government investigated the extent of compliance and on finding non-compliance by major corporate hospitals as well as smaller enterprises has taken the matter to court. An official committee headed by a CBI deputy director recently found that the rate of compliance of private hospitals to tax exemption guidelines on import of medical equipment is almost negligible. 'According to highly placed sources in the health ministry, the ministry of finance had issued a notification as per which the customs duty payable on expensive medical equipment was

waived. The customs duty exemption scheme was crafted to facilitate the state of the art private health care.' (*Observer*, Delhi, 26 November 1999).

The dependence on high technology medical equipment has a direct bearing on costs of medical care. The larger hospitals have mobilised capital to purchase high technology medical equipment which has pushed up the cost of medical care. This trend is not peculiar to India and has been observed in the US as well. A recent study of private hospitals in Hyderabad and Chennai shows that the cost of certain surgical procedures is higher in corporate hospitals compared to the medium and small ones. For example, in Hyderabad the median costs for hysterectomy was between Rs 14000 to 23,000 in the corporate sector while it was in the range of Rs 4000 to 6000 in smaller nursing homes. Similarly, corporates charged between Rs 10,000 to 12,000 for a caesarian section, while the cost was around Rs 6000 in the smaller nursing homes. For other specific surgical interventions the cost in corporate hospitals was roughly twice those prevailing in trust run hospitals and smaller nursing homes.<sup>3</sup>

There is a growing demand from the middle class for both public and private health insurance as individuals cannot afford such high costs. This 'pull' factor has definitely been responsible for attracting insurance companies into the Indian health care market. A 'push' factor which has

forced them to view this market is the recession in the health insurance market in developed countries, particularly the United States. The passing of the Insurance Bill will definitely strengthen the bigger players in the market.

With the passing of the Insurance Bill several American companies have shown interest in tying up with their Indian counterparts. The Wockhardt group of pharmaceutical companies which manage two hospitals in Bangalore, has tied up with six leading American and UK based medical insurance companies. These include Global Emergency Services, Global Medical Management, Medex, Assist America, Bluecross and Blueshield (*Financial Express*, Delhi, 21 December 1999). The computer software industry has also entered the health care market. It generates software for hospital operations and, using the internet, provides web-based services. Healtheon Corporation, a US based internet firm, plans to make an additional investment of \$10 million and is tying up with private hospitals and pharmaceutical companies for providing web-based services. A doctor based in Chennai has taken the initiative to even provide e-mail based doctor-patient consultations. Many of these tie-ups are currently at a nascent stage but will definitely change the character of provisioning and medical practice in the future.

Given these trends, consumer groups have voiced a need for the regulation of medical practice and private hospitals. The questions about how and who can do it, however, remain unanswered. The experience of regulation though varied is limited. Any system of regulation must deal with such parameters as registration of institutions, their physical standards, standardisation of costs, and private

3 Rama V. Baru, Brjesh Purohit and David Daniel, *Efficacy of Private Hospitals and the Central Government Health Scheme—A Study of Hyderabad and Chennai*. Report submitted to Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, GOI, New Delhi, June 1999 (mimeo), Rama V. Baru, *Private Health Care in India, Social Characteristics and Trends*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1998.

practice by government doctors. While attempts have been made to stop private practice, they have not been successful. Apart from framing rules for the functioning of doctors and hospitals, a regulatory framework has also to evolve a policy on the import of equipment and address the question of registration of medical equipment.

**S**imilarly, with the passing of the Insurance Bill, a regulatory framework needs to be evolved for health insurance. The Insurance Regulatory Authority has laid down some guidelines but these need to be reviewed and debated. Basically, what is required is a systemic perspective on the issue of regulation. Merely regulating private hospitals will be insufficient because effective mechanisms need to be evolved to regulate insurance companies, as well as medical equipment, pharmaceutical and software companies.

The recent trends in privatisation have serious implications for public health at several levels. The rise of corporate hospitals has resulted in the marketing of health care as a branded product, symbolised by fancy buildings, well-appointed surroundings and high technology equipment. Indeed, as in the case of most branded products, high cost is projected as high value and made synonymous with quality care. Such developments influence the perception of consumers who associate 'good quality care' with high technology and plush surroundings. Although most consumers of corporate hospitals are from the upper and middle classes, the working and farmer classes also access these services since they perceive them as providing quality care. These perceptions fuel certain expectations from public and other private hospitals which may not be able to compete with these larger enterprises.

Privatisation has influenced the perception and practice of the medical professional. With an increased reliance on high technology, there is a greater emphasis on specialisation and a devalued role assigned to general practice. Higher salaries in the corporate sector have resulted in a movement of senior government doctors from teaching hospitals to corporate hospitals. This trend has been observed both in Delhi and Hyderabad where a large number of senior specialists have resigned from government service to join corporate hospitals. They cited better working conditions and salaries as two important reasons for doing so. The emergence of large private hospitals has definitely pushed up the cost of medical care and the marketing strategy has helped project the view that higher cost means better care. In an unregulated market, the consumer cannot be certain about the costs to be borne.

**W**ith the growth of private medical, nursing and technical training institutes there is concern about the quality of education and a lack of manpower planning. In Andhra Pradesh, a number of private medical colleges and nursing institutions have been established. However, most of them lack the required staff and infrastructure to train personnel. This will negatively impact the quality of training imparted to medical and paramedical personnel. A number of subsidies have been given by the government to the private sector but their monitoring and implementation is extremely poor. The conditionalities attached to such subsidies must be better enforced and private hospitals made accountable to consumers through transparency in their pricing, billing, maintenance of medical records, among other aspects.

# Engendering health

T K SUNDARI RAVINDRAN

THE term 'gender' is often used as synonymous with 'sex', male and female. Though the two are indeed synonymous according to English language dictionaries, the term 'gender' has over the past three decades evolved into a concept different from 'sex'. Ann Oakley and others used the term gender in the 1970s to describe those characteristics of men and women which are socially determined, as against 'sex' which describes biologically determined characteristics. This distinction between sex and gender provides a useful analytical tool for focusing attention on differences between women and men which are socially constructed.

Many of the differences in men's and women's roles and responsibilities, norms and values guiding appropriate behaviour and access to and control over resources, have less to do with the fact that they were born

male or female or that women alone can be impregnated and bear children, and more with how society expects women and men to behave. These in turn are derived from patriarchal ideology – a system of ideas based on a belief in inherent male superiority. This ideology typically includes the belief that male control over property is 'the natural order of things'.

What do we mean by 'engendering' health or a gender perspective on health? The very term suggests that it is not the same as focusing on women's health, or even more narrowly on health conditions exclusively experienced by women as a consequence of their biology.

Traditional frameworks for analysing women's health have often concentrated on the childbearing years, and especially with health problems related to pregnancy and childbearing. Besides their special health needs that



are different from those of men due to biological differences, women are also exposed to all the health problems that affect men throughout their lifecycle. Thus malaria, tuberculosis, occupational and environmental health hazards – all these impact women's health needs too. In fact, since infections such as malaria and hepatitis become life-threatening conditions for women during pregnancy, they are issues of special concern.

A gendered perspective on health includes, besides examining differences in health needs, looking at differences between women and men in risk factors and determinants, severity and duration, differences in perceptions of illness, in access to and utilisation of health services, and in health outcomes. 'When considering the differences between women and men (in health status), there is a tendency to emphasize biological or sex differences as explanatory factors of well-being and illness. A gender approach in health, while not excluding biological factors, considers the critical roles that social and cultural factors and power relations between women and men play in promoting and protecting or impeding health.'<sup>1</sup>

**W**hy do we advocate engendering health? Few would disagree with the view that health is a product of the physical and social environment in which we live and act, which is in turn affected by the global and local environment: social, cultural, economic and political. It is also widely acknowledged on the basis of studies conducted in diverse settings that inequalities in health across population groups arise largely as a consequence of differences in social and economic status and differential

access to power and resources. The heaviest burden of ill-health is borne by those who are most deprived, not just economically, but also in terms of capability, such as literacy levels and access to information.

**S**ubstantial evidence exists to indicate that in almost all societies women and men have differing roles and responsibilities within the family and in society, experience different social realities, and enjoy unequal access to and control over resources. It therefore follows that gender is an important social determinant of health. Gender differences are observed in every stratum of society, and within every social group, across different castes, races, ethnic or religious groups.

Men and women perform different tasks and occupy different social, and often different physical, spaces. The sexual division of labour within the household, and labour market segregation by sex into predominantly male and female jobs, expose men and women to varying health risks. For example, the responsibility for cooking exposes poor women and girls to smoke from cooking fuels. Studies show that a pollutant released indoors is 1000 times more likely to reach people's lungs since it is released at close proximity than a pollutant released outdoors. Thus, the division of labour by sex, a social construct, makes women more vulnerable to chronic respiratory disorders including chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, with fatal consequences.<sup>2</sup> Men would in turn be more exposed to risks related to activities and tasks that are by convention male, such as mining.

Differences in the way society values men and women, and accepted

norms of male and female behaviour influence risk of developing specific health problems as well as health outcomes. Studies have indicated that preference for sons and the undervaluation of daughters skew the investment in feeding and health care. This has potentially serious negative health consequences for girls, including avoidable mortality. On the other hand, social expectations about male behaviour may expose boys to a greater risk of accidents, and to the adverse health consequences of smoking and alcohol use.

Patriarchal norms which deny women the right to make decisions regarding their sexuality and reproduction expose them to avoidable risks of morbidity and mortality, be it through sexually transmitted infection resulting from coercive sex, or death from septic abortion because access to safe abortion has been denied by state legislation. The practice of unsafe sex by large sections of men who are aware of the health risks cannot be explained except in terms of gender norms of acceptable and/or desirable male sexual behaviour.

**B**ecause men and women are conditioned to adhere to prevailing gender norms, their perceptions and definitions of health and ill-health are likely to vary, as is their health seeking behaviour. Women may not recognise the symptoms of a health problem, not treat it as serious or warranting medical help, and more commonly, not perceive themselves as entitled to invest in their well-being.

Finally, because women and men do not have equal access to and control over resources such as money, transport and time, and because the decision-making power within the family is unequal with men enjoying privileges that women are denied, women's access to health services is

1 World Health Organization, *Gender and Health: Technical paper* WHO/FRH/WHO/98.16, Geneva, 1998.

2 World Health Organization, *Health and Environment in Sustainable Development: Five Years After the Earth Summit*. Geneva, 1997.

restricted. They may be allowed to decide on seeking medical care for their children, but may need the permission of their husbands or significant elders within the family to seek health care for themselves. Restrictions on women's physical mobility, common in many parts of India, often makes it imperative for women to be accompanied to a health facility by a male family member.

**I**n many instances, biologically determined differences between women and men interact with socially constructed behaviour to the disadvantage of women. This is best illustrated in the case of sexually transmitted infections. Women are biologically more susceptible to contracting a sexually transmitted infection than men. This is because of the shape of the vagina and a greater mucosal surface exposed to a greater quantity of pathogens during sexual intercourse, since the quantity of seminal fluid is far greater than the vaginal fluid involved. Further, women with a sexually transmitted infection are more likely to be asymptomatic and therefore less likely to seek treatment. Untreated and undiagnosed sexually transmitted infections are the cause of chronic infections and numerous long term complications suffered by women, including infertility and cervical cancer.

There are other factors which compound women's vulnerability because of the way society expects women and men to behave. For a majority of women, high risk activity can simply mean being married. Social norms which accept extra-marital and pre-marital sexual relationships in men as 'normal', and women's inability to negotiate safe sex practices with their partners, are factors that make it difficult for women to protect themselves from

sexually transmitted infections. A study of STD (sexually transmitted diseases) clinic patients in India (1992) indicated that a third of the women, all in monogamous married relationships, were infected by their husbands, while the majority of the male patients were infected by commercial sex workers and casual sexual partners. Not a single man was infected by his wife.<sup>3</sup> Men's unwillingness to use condoms further accentuates women's risk. For example, in a study of the prevalence of and risk factors for HIV infection in Tamil Nadu, India (1994-1995) covering a population of about 97,000, less than 2% of married men were found to be condom users.<sup>4</sup> The stigma attached to visiting an STD clinic together with other barriers such as lack of time, money and decision-making power discourages women from seeking treatment.

**T**o summarise, both 'sex' and 'gender' differences between women and men, and the many ways in which the two are intertwined, contribute to differences in health risks, health seeking behaviour, access to and utilisation of health services and health outcomes between the two groups. Research, policy and services aiming to improve the health status of a population will have to examine, understand and address these differences.

One of the biggest obstacles to better engendered health policies and services is the limited availability of information on sex and gender differ-

ences in health status. Engendering health information would imply the collection and dissemination of data on differences between males and females in (among others) health outcomes such as mortality, morbidity and undernutrition; causes of morbidity and mortality; specific population groups who are most affected (e.g., age, socio-economic or ethnic groups); and recognition of health problems and utilisation of health services.

**P**robing the reasons why there are observed differences between men and women in health outcomes, determinants of health status and in health seeking behaviour, calls for engendering health research. It would imply asking questions such as:

- \* Are women and men at differential risk of exposure to infection or different in terms of vulnerability? Are these caused by 'sex' differences or 'gender' roles and norms? Do these also affect the rates of progression from infection to disease, (and/or) severity of illness experienced and the duration of the illness? Are they at differential risk of recurrent infection?
- \* Do gender norms differentially influence women's and men's ability to recognise health problems, their access to health services and their ability to successfully complete treatment?
- \* Are there differences in the treatment received at health facilities by women and men? Do these contribute to differential health outcomes?

In many instances, assumptions about gender roles contribute to the invisibility of some health problems suffered by women. For example, gender ideology reinforces the notion that women's work at home is 'not real work'. As a consequence, classical definitions of occupational health do not include the health impact on

3 P. Ramachandran, Women's Vulnerability to AIDS: A Symposium in the Transmission, Prevention and Management of the Pandemic. *Seminar* 396, August 1992, pp 21-25.

4. S. Solomon, N. Kumarasamy, A.K. Ganesh and R. E. Amalraj, 'Prevalence and Risk Factors of HIV-1 and HIV-2 Infection in Urban and Rural Areas of Tamil Nadu, India', *International Journal of STD and AIDS* 2, 1998-99, pp. 98-103.

women of their domestic and child-bearing and rearing roles, although globally women dedicate an important part of their lives to it. Engendering health information would require a framework which explicitly takes into consideration women's multifarious roles in production, reproduction and community activities.

Engendering health research also means the adoption of methodologies which have an adequate representation of both sexes, so that sex/gender specific analysis of data is possible; ensuring that women are adequately represented as respondents in the case of household surveys; eliminating or minimising bias arising from differential costs and benefits to men and women from participating in the study, and so on.

**H**ealth policies are often 'gender blind'. They make references to general categories such as 'communities' or 'the rural poor', without making any distinctions by gender. In effect, they are implicitly male biased. The invisibility of women in occupational health is a good example of why gender based differences need to be explicitly considered in examining health issues and formulating policies.

Engendering health policies is different from the adoption of a 'women's health policy'. It refers to the development of health policies that address not only women's special needs but also the health needs they share with men, taking into account gender differences in aspects such as health risks, determinants of health, and health seeking behaviour.

For example, an engendered health policy would recognise spousal violence as a gender related health problem to which women are disproportionately more exposed because of social norms sanctioning male aggression and their right to control women.

It would examine environmental health hazards separately for men and women, and devise programmes to prevent and control exposure accordingly. It would provide for active tuberculosis case-finding to minimise under-reporting of infection in women, and examine whether or not women's biological differences contribute to their greater vulnerability to the infection, or to its consequences. Such a health policy would examine and correct gender disparities in human resources within the health sector and gender biases perpetuated by medical education.

**M**ore importantly, in the case of health issues which are specific to women, an engendered health policy would go beyond merely providing a technical service. It would address this 'practical' need of women in a way that challenges existing gender roles and stereotypes transforming women's situation with respect to men. A 'safe motherhood' policy, for instance, would not assume either that women alone are responsible for childcare, or that they have access to the resources to ensure their own as well as their child's well-being. It would be designed with an awareness that women often do not have a say in whether and when to get pregnant. It would acknowledge that many pregnancies are unwanted or ill-timed from the woman's point of view, and would provide women with the option of safe pregnancy termination. Indeed, the policy would not even be called safe motherhood policy, but a safer pregnancy policy, allowing for the possibility of safe pregnancy termination.

In other words, an engendered health policy would also seek to transform existing gender relations in a more democratic direction by redistributing more evenly the division of

resources, responsibilities and power between women and men.

A gender aware health policy would not be blind to other forms of social inequities, and treat women or men as homogenous groups. It would be based on the understanding that women and men are divided along class, caste, religious, ethnic lines, and ensure that the poorer and marginalised sections are not implicitly excluded. This is especially important in an era of cuts in the health sector budgets and decentralisation. Inter-regional disparities may be further accentuated if wealthier regions are able to mobilise more funds than poorer ones. Public health facilities in the poorer regions would be especially hit hard, and preventive care may receive reduced funding. This would give rise to a dependence on health services in the private sector, placing the poorer sections at a disadvantage and widening health inequities. A gender aware policy evolved in this context would explicitly consider gender disparities within the poorer and marginalised groups and design strategies that would help meet the needs of poor women.

**W**hat this implies is that the process of policy-making itself would be grassroots up, involving large scale mobilisation at the grassroots level. Experiences from countries such as South Africa show that gender aware policies which evolve through this process reflect the priorities of the poorest and most vulnerable groups in society. A few informed feminists negotiating with the bureaucracy, without prior consultation with women from various sectors of society, would not be the way to go.

Another issue to bear in mind is that it is not sufficient to design a gender aware policy in the health sector alone, if policies in other areas that

have a bearing on health – all development policies for that matter – are gender blind, with an implicit male bias.

While engendering health policies is in itself a complex process, translating these into programmes is a far more challenging task. Examples of policies which are progressive on paper but inadequately implemented are numerous everywhere in the world. This appears to be especially true of gender aware policies which 'evaporate' even by the time that a policy statement begins to spell out concrete programme interventions, and almost completely disappear when they get to the stage of implementation.

In an article entitled 'The evaporation of policies for women's advancement', Longwe argues that gender aware policies run contrary to the interests of bureaucracies which are inherently patriarchal in nature. Government agencies are not and cannot be expected to be a means for redressing gender inequities because they are themselves a part of the problem and an obstacle to progress. She talks about the endless capacity of the government bureaucracy to evaporate policies for women's advancement.<sup>5</sup> The active involvement of the women's movement and civil society institutions is essential, and not just to ensure that policies are engendered. Without the continued involvement and independent monitoring by these actors, gender aware policies will never be pursued but be given a quiet burial.

A number of tools have been developed for monitoring how engen-

dered a health programme is. Some of the major questions to be asked include: Does the programme address gender differentials in health risks, health information and access to health services?

To give one example, does a malaria control programme take into account the fact that even though reported prevalence of malaria is higher among men than in women overall, malaria in pregnancy has a much higher case-fatality rate? Does it seek to gather and analyse information on malaria incidence and prevalence by sex and disaggregated into various population sub-groups so that it becomes clearer whether or not the general pattern of higher prevalence among males is true for all population sub-groups? Does it seek to inform pregnant women about the risks associated with malaria in pregnancy? Does it engage in active case-finding, i.e., take samples for blood tests within the community, so that women are not under-represented among those tested and so on?

Does the programme load all responsibilities for improved health on women rather than also involving men? Does the programme add to women's work load? For example, does the child survival programme also aim its messages at fathers? Are health education programmes conducted only for mothers, or both parents? Do nutrition programmes address themselves only to women, or expect them to spend more time in food preparation?

Does the programme perpetuate gender biases? Do fertility control programmes, for instance, actively involve men and promote male methods of contraception rather than target women and blame women for 'high fertility'? Do strategies for the control of sexually transmitted infec-

tions focus on condom use by men rather than making women responsible for negotiating condom use with their partners, or treating commercial sex workers as 'reservoirs of infection'?

Will the programme contribute to redressing inequities in health by gender across various sections of the population? Some examples of how this could be achieved are: correcting gender imbalances in access to health information by providing women with the information and skills that would enable them to make informed choices about their health, creating women-friendly health facilities or making health care available closer to home, and to bridge the gender gap in access to health care.

Does the programme address and help narrow gender gaps in terms of distribution of responsibilities and power among health personnel? Engendering health programmes could lead to adding to the responsibilities of female health workers at the community and health facility levels disproportionately more than their male counterparts. A conscious attempt has to be made to ensure that this does not happen, and that male health workers are also involved in the process of engendering health programmes, especially in making health prevention and promotion as much men's business as it is women's.

To redress health inequities by gender requires, above all, commitment and conscious involvement of health personnel at senior levels. Of all the factors listed thus far, the patriarchal nature of the health bureaucracy and of the medical establishment would probably prove the most formidable obstacle to engendering health. This, then, would be our starting point – gender sensitisation of the medical community.

5. S H Longwe, *The Evaporation of Policies for Women's Advancement*, in N. Heyzer (ed), *A Commitment to the World's Women: Perspectives on Development for Beijing and Beyond*, United Nations, New York, 1995.

# Unsafe abortion

SUNITA BANDEWAR

WOMEN in India are fortunate in having access to legal abortion services, made possible through the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act, 1971. The act passed by the Indian Parliament is considered revolutionary for it allows women to both avail abortion care due to failure of contraception and have access to abortion without the husband's consent.

The government and policy-makers deserve kudos for decriminalising the act of abortion (criminalised by the Indian Penal Code 1860, a legacy of the British); this while women the world over are still striving to get abortion legalised. This battle continues in many countries

irrespective of their development status, religious orientation, political ideology and despite being signatories to various international treaties and covenants, indicating that it involves complex dynamics.

Unfortunately, the potential of the act has not been put to the best use either for women or the nation. Perhaps if we could identify the problems, it might help us locate the solutions. However, in doing so, it is essential that the magnitude of ill-health that is attributable to unsafe abortion care services be fathomed and acknowledged. This article attempts to locate unsafe abortion as an issue of public health concern. This is done in the

wider context of quality of abortion care that prevails today on the one hand, and the socio-cultural and demographic context of abortion on the other.

**T**he non-availability of quality data on abortion continues to be troubling. The perspective, therefore, has to evolve by placing our micro-level empirical research findings into the larger context of state and national level statistics on abortion and related issues from other sources. Towards the end, it is argued that the need of the hour is to shift focus from unsafe abortion as an issue of public health concern to access to safe and legal abortion as a women's rights issue.

The most important factors determining a nation's abortion policies are the nation's population concerns, priorities and policies. For instance, experience the world over shows that while pro-natalist governments safeguard their interests by denying women access to abortion, anti-natalist governments project and implement liberal abortion policies to achieve the state's goal of population control. In either case, women are viewed merely as reproductive machines. The cause of women's ill-health on account of undergoing unsafe abortion, therefore, is deep rooted in this grossly mis-articulated philosophy behind allowing or denying access to abortion as a means to achieve the interests of society at large. The mathematical equation that is constructed out of this philosophy thus only messes up the situation, not only for women but for nations too.

Where does India stand as regards legislative measures and the motivation behind it? The story of abortion in India on the count of passing of the MTP Act reads well and is encouraging. However, one cannot stop frowning upon medicalisation

and the restrictive nature of the act on the one hand, and raising one's eyebrows over the loopholes that it leaves to interpret liberally or restrictively according to the larger societal needs and demands on the other (Jesani 1993). Currently the government's anti-natalist policy and strong conviction about the need to bring down population growth rates, coupled with the interests of the medical fraternity, allows a liberal interpretation of the act. Despite that, women's access to quality abortion care has yet to become a reality more than a quarter century after the MTP Act was implemented. This is what makes the story of abortion in India an ill-fated one.

**W**hat is the Indian scenario as regards abortion mortality and morbidity? The estimates about the rate of abortion, proportionate induced abortions, mortality and morbidity attributable to abortion are startling. According to a conservative assumption, for every 73 live births there are 25 abortions of which three-fifths are induced. Based on these assumptions, an average estimate for the current decade is five million legal and illegal induced abortion per annum in India (Bandewar 1999). The Indian Survey of Death reports that nearly 18% of maternal deaths result from abortion (GOI '91-95). Data from various other sources suggest that maternal mortality resulting from unsafe abortion ranges from 4.5 to 16.9% (Bhatia 1988; RGI 1988; Reddy 1992). An estimated ratio of illegal to legal abortions ranges between 3 to 1 and 8 to 1 (Bandewar 1999; Karkal 1991).

Why is the situation so grave despite a provision for legal abortion? Unsafe abortion as a public health issue is not a difficult riddle to fathom though it may defy easy solution. The foremost factor that has a direct bearing on the outcome of an

abortion procedure is the quality of abortion care that a woman receives. The concept of quality of health care has come of age today. Over the decades and centuries of knowledge and experiences in medical care, and with new waves of interdisciplinary approaches to understanding the issue at hand, the concept has become an all inclusive and multifaceted one.

It refers to the availability of, accessibility to and approachability to abortion care facilities; availability of minimum physical standards and qualified and adequate human power to offer such care; nature and texture of the interpersonal communication between the staff at the health care facilities and women; the content of communication and counselling; the quality of outcome of the procedure; women's satisfaction about the services that they receive and the biomedical indicators; the status as regards post-operative complications and so on.

**T**hus, this comprehensive concept of quality of care takes note of both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of health care. The empirical research on the quality of abortion care, conducted in the 1990s, reveals a pathetic and gruesome state of affairs and should solve to a great extent the riddle of alarming statistics about abortion mortality and morbidity. Macro-level data on many of the aspects mentioned above is not available and thus small scale empirical research assumes significance.

Are abortion care facilities required to be registered under the MTP Act? For the reader to get an idea about the poor quality of abortion care that women receive, we present data on some of the gross indicators of quality of care from our empirical research. We conducted research in nine tehsils of Pune and Ratnagiri dis-

tracts of Maharashtra. The nine tehsils included in the study had 159 health care facilities which offered abortion care services. In case of abortion care services, the facility needs to be registered under the MTP Act.

**O**ur data show that on average, for every single MTP registered abortion care facility (ACFs) there were around three non-registered ACFs, the ratio varying between 1:1 to 1:5. National level statistics on MTP centres suggest wide variation across the states. However, in general, MTP facilities remain inadequate. In India, in the mid-90s there were 9271 centres, while the number of MTPs reported was 609915 (Family Welfare Programme in India, Year Book, 1993-94).

Are abortion care facilities accessible, approachable and adequate? Our study shows that the distribution of ACFs was grossly skewed, spatially sparse and uneven. A total of 159 ACFs from nine tehsils were situated in 44 villages/townships, concentrated mostly in townships and in villages with a population of 5000 and more. These ACFs supported the population from 1447 villages of the nine tehsils of which about 69% were connected by some state transport facility. Tough terrain and lack of transport facilities not only caused inconvenience but added to the cost women bear in terms of time and money.

According to our study the number of women between 15-49 years of age who may need abortion care facilities varied between 172 to 1007 per urban based ACF and 3124 to 21553 per rural based ACF. The number of abortions per facility ranged between 54 to 480. For India, for the year 1994, there were 62.7 MTPs per MTP facility.

How do public health care facilities help in abortion care? Availabil-

ity of abortion care services at public centres clearly means free of charge services. In our study, of the total public health care facilities eligible for abortion care service, the proportionate share ranged between 9 to 56% in selected tehsils. Overall, of the total eligible public facilities about one-fourth provided abortion care services. The percentage at the national level is as low as 8%. According to unpublished data for the state of Maharashtra, 1992-93, about 70.3% of the approved centres were in the private sector (Jesani and Iyer 1995). Our data show that of the total, only about 8% of the qualified abortion providers were based in public health care facilities.

**A**re the abortion care service providers qualified as defined in the act? The proportion of non-allopathic to allopathic abortion service providers varied between 1:1 to 1:4. Of a total of 207 abortion service providers, about 56% were not qualified under the MTP Act. Of the total, more than one-fourth were non-allopaths. Such a massive indulgence of the medical fraternity into illegal abortion care service provision, even in institution based abortion care delivery, naturally exposes women to unsafe abortions. Many studies have recorded the involvement of other service providers – ranging from local abortionists and magicians, trained and untrained *dais*, ANMs and ayurvedic and homeopathic practitioners.

Of the 2189 abortions studied, about 67% were by non-allopaths, assuming that those done at public health care facilities were by allopaths. This not only highlights poor implementation and monitoring of the act, but also raises the question as to why such rampant indulgence prevails. A mass exodus of specialised allopath medical providers towards

developed and urban areas even at the risk of saturation, almost inhibiting non-allopaths from entering the market complemented by women's lack of purchasing quality care, provides a partial answer.

**A**re abortion care services affordable? The cost of abortion care varied between Rs 300 to Rs 3,000. The cost of travel that women bear and sometimes for drugs to be purchased being over and above the medical costs at the institution. Interestingly, in addition to rational determinants of cost such as type of method used, a woman's marital and socio-economic status and the extent of her vulnerability often determine the price of service she receives.

There is a lack of standardised pricing of health care in general. Many other micro-level studies have shown a similar range. An average per capita income of Rs 3168 (1984-85) for Maharashtra (NFHS 1992-93), 37% of the population falling below the poverty line (GOI 1997, Appendix 4, as quoted by Mooij 1999) for Maharashtra and a minimum wage of around Rs 35 highlight the various hazardous options that women face. In such situations, women either resort to unsafe intervention by a local abortionist, or place themselves in debt to seek institution based care.

How are abortion care facilities placed vis-à-vis minimum physical standards and professional competence of the service providers? We studied 115 out of 159 ACFs for detailed indicators on the quality of abortion care. Only 16% ACFs met the criteria of minimum physical standards as regards abortion care; 46% ACFs were supported by qualified abortion service providers stipulated in the MTP Act. On further analysis to understand comprehensive quality of care as regards 'struc-

tural aspects – minimum physical standards (equipment, instruments, essential drugs) and qualified abortion service provider and anaesthetists' – the number of ACFs, appropriately equipped and supported by qualified professionals came down to a mere 13 (of 115). One is often cautious about making generalisations based on such micro-level empirical research. Nonetheless, it would not be erroneous to suggest that this represents the abysmally poor status of abortion care services in general, with some regional variations.

**W**here do the existing abortion care services stand as regards their soft facets, such as client-provider interpersonal communication and counselling? Our study indicates an unsatisfactory situation regarding the significance of 'counselling' in our health care delivery system. Both the content and texture of these communications were not conducive for encouraging women's participation in the process. They were inadequate and cryptic, and maintained the power hierarchy between the 'knowledgeable medical professional' and 'ignorant lay women'. The former's moralistic positions about abortion led them to penalise women who were often beleaguered with a feeling of guilt about the 'crime' they had committed. Rarely did the providers engage in conducting minimum pre-operative tests such as blood group and count and post-operative checks, or checking for infections. Nor were they particular about communicating the do's and don'ts of post operation, or informing patients about indications of post operative complications. In the absence of post operative care facilities and women's constraints in utilising them, the chances of mortality and morbidity only increase. It is, therefore, essen-

tial to change prevailing attitudes of both women and providers towards abortion.

**H**ow are the providers supported through training and continuing education to update themselves with the advances in medical sciences? There are no serious efforts towards upgrading skills of abortion care providers keeping pace with advances in medical techniques (methods and equipment/instruments) vis-à-vis abortion procedures; abortion care providers still prefer using the conventional methods foregoing the safety advantages of the former. More than 60% of the abortion care providers/facilities still use dilation and curettage (D&C) for the first trimester abortion procedures instead of safer vacuum aspiration methods (Barge, et al. 1994; REAP/CEHAT, unpublished). In general, the prevailing MTP training facilities are inadequate and deficient.

Where do we locate the problems of persistent poor quality of abortion care? It could be located in poor implementation of the MTP Act and low compliance, absence of accountability and self regulation on the part of the medical fraternity. It may be noted that the so called registered MTP ACFs do not necessarily meet all the legal criteria about essential minimum physical standards and qualified human power for conducting abortion procedures. This highlights the fact that legislative measures do not necessarily ensure women's access to safe abortion care. A paucity of adequate budgetary allocation underscores these lacunae.

How does the socio-cultural fabric of abortion affect women's access to safe abortion care services? What are its implications for women's health? A health care delivery system is only one side of the story. Patterns

of utilisation of health care services in general, and abortion care in particular, are a result of the interfacing of a complex socio-cultural fabric and the health care services – its mode of delivery, nature and profile. The social stigma attached to an act of abortion, woman's status in the family, her lack of negotiating power in the sexual relationship with the husband only makes the situation worse. Also, the state's pressure to limit family size and space children, social pressure on the couple to prove fertility immediately after the marriage, the pressure to produce the right gender mix of children and, above all the pressure to compulsarily produce a male child to feel 'honoured' and allow a continuation of the family lineage, pushes women to use abortion as a coping mechanism.

**C**ommunity based qualitative studies to understand women's abortion needs, their decision-making process, their concern for quality of care and choice of provider show that in addition to the inherent complexity of the decision, a lack of consensus and support from family members, which is normally the case, forces women to operate on their own, often trading quality for confidentiality. Their overriding concern for maintaining confidentiality also constrict their choice of provider (Gupte, et al. 1999). It is thus not unusual that women resort to clandestine abortions, exposing themselves to risk.

Women's abortion needs are not contingent upon their class, caste or religion. However, women from marginal groups are more likely to have poorer access to quality abortion care services. In sum, it is clear that skewed, sparse and uneven distribution of inadequate abortion care facilities make women's access to abortion care difficult. Even if women manage



to access these facilities and overcome the range of hurdles arising from the socio-cultural context of abortion, the struggle is far from over and safe abortion care is not always assured.

What strategies would help improve women's access to safe and legal abortion care services? While bringing about changes in the social fabric is an ongoing and gradual process, sensitive and thoughtful changes centred around woman's health and well-being at the programmatic and planning level should certainly facilitate women's access to abortion care yielding positive results for women's health in a tangible period of time.

**W**e have to acknowledge the fact that abortion care facilities, or for that matter most of the reproductive health care services, are situated within the larger health care delivery system. Thus, streamlining and strengthening the existing health care delivery system, including measures to correct the skewed distribution of health care facilities and health care providers, is an essential prerequisite. Moreover, it is fundamental to incorporate women's specific needs to make them meaningful to women. A nuanced understanding of women's health concerns and needs and impact of the socio-cultural fabric on women's utilisation patterns of general and specific health care services gathered through empirical research needs to be translated into policy planning and delivery of health care services.

Where do we move from here? In the Indian context there has been a tendency to treat and project abortion as a public health issue, not naively but strategically. However, if we continue on this path in the future, there is a danger of losing sight of the new challenges as a consequence of globalisation, cultural revivalism and global strengthening of fundamen-

talism. The pressure and push of the pro-life movement, including their intimidating strategies in the West, have been responsible for a regression of the pro-choice stream. In this changing context it would not be a surprise if we end up losing the battle that we had won in the past.

**A**ll religious fundamentalist movements are prejudiced against abortion as a women's right. With the upsurge of Hindutva and rightist forces at the national level, the moral argument over abortion as an issue of public health could easily be slammed at us, conveniently sidetracking unsafe abortion within the framework of women's right to safe and legal abortion. Already billboards damning abortion are a common sight in Mumbai. This should serve as an adequate warning to those concerned about women's well being and rights.

The other challenge relates to a rising number of sex selective abortions and a range of other sex selective practices. Despite a legal ban on prenatal diagnostics to identify the sex of the foetus, often with the intention to abort in case of a female foetus, its rampant use is an open secret. This battle has now to be joined afresh on two fronts: (a) to pressurise for effective implementation and (b) to make legislation more inclusive against the backdrop that newer genetic technologies are being developed to enable pre-conceptional sex selection which the existing legislation does not take note of. Arguments articulated around the negative consequences of abortion for women's health can go against women's right to abortion and hence may prove to be self-defeating. The protest against sex selective practices has to continue based on the core argument that it is sex discriminatory and, therefore, violative of human rights.

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# Whither indigenous medicine

MADHULIKA BANERJEE

PICTURE this: Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi, the House of Science in the capital. Two blue panels proclaim the coming together of government and industry; the prime minister addresses a gathering of 1500 people, in which he is welcomed with the blowing of a conch shell and gifted a *bel* plant for good health and well-being. Naturopathy inspired snacks are served to the guests (with a back-up of the usual *chai* and *samosa*); presentations are made from laptops onto projection screens; and the chairman of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) delivers the keynote address. So what's brewing? A conference on the challenges to Indian systems of medicine and homoeopathy, appropriately titled Good Health in the Millennium! As an advance publicity report put it, 'Traditional medicine never had it so good.'

Represented at the conference was the government (by no less than the PM and a senior minister) and the representatives of industry (CII bosses along with their major sponsors) – both putting their weight behind a hitherto marginalised and languishing sector, that of the Indian systems of medicine and homoeopathy (ISM hereafter). Some days earlier, the gov-

ernment had upgraded the small division in the large Ministry for Health and Family Welfare responsible for ISM into a full-fledged department, complete with the post of secretary; it had also started a web page, signalling that this sector had definitely arrived.

These developments were meant to launch the ISM in both the public and private health arenas in a markedly different way, creating an impression that this sector, once on the margins, was now elbowing its way towards the centre. As the chairman of the CSIR remarked, if the world was going herbal, could India be far behind?

I argue here that this is a picture so carefully painted that the old print it glosses over could easily be missed. Indeed, India has been herbal, like other civilizations, for as long as we can remember. But from the end of the 19th century until well into the 20th, this reality was sought to be erased. The post-colonial nationalist rhetoric never fails to deride the colonial state's policies and attitudes for ignoring the ISM, a claim supported by later research' (Arnold 1994; Bala 1991). What is less realised is that the post-colonial Indian state too systematically marginalised the ISM for the

better part of 50 years in ways that are explicated later.

Within the framework of the market, companies making traditional medicines were not only small but considered as encoding low prospects. What now appears like a reversal of that trend is not actually so. All that is new today is a rediscovery of the possibilities of going herbal, but on a different set of parameters. These parameters are being defined by the momentum and direction of the dominant economies of the world, in turn setting the frame which countries with old herbal traditions have now to follow. So if government and industry in our country seem to have suddenly woken up to the glories of herbalism, it is not out of some loyalty to indigeneity or tradition, but a level-headed recognition of its increased marketability particularly in the international economy.

**T**o understand the process by which indigenous medicine is being located in the public health sector today and its continuing relevance, we need to appreciate three aspects of our development – the policy processes of the post-colonial Indian nation state, the market mechanics during the colonial and post-colonial periods, and the new dynamics of the international economy, in particular the response it is eliciting from both the Indian state and market.

Let me first deal with two preliminary questions. First, what is the Indian system of medicine? ISM is a term of bureaucratic convenience and includes Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha and Naturopathy, all ancient medical systems practiced in India. There are three characteristics of the ISM that set them apart from other traditional or folk medical systems. First, these systems have a textual tradition, evolved over many historical periods,

which record both knowledge as well as practices. This sets them apart from many other 'traditional' or 'folk' medicine systems that exist in India and elsewhere. Unlike the others, ISM is well documented, verifiable for its authenticity and does not necessarily rely on oral traditions.

**S**Second, unlike other textual traditions, ISM allows for plurality. The diversity of practice with respect to geography, topography and biodiversity within each tradition (particularly Ayurveda) is evident in the composition of these texts and demonstrates interesting localised pluralisms in otherwise canon-bound traditions. Third, the development of each specific system is profoundly influenced by the others, including the incorporation of new elements in pharmacology and diagnostic and treatment practices. Thus, while maintaining distinct identities, they are close in both orientation and practice. As argued later, this characteristic is often deliberately overlooked to score ideological points about the overarching superiority of Ayurveda. This is one way the Hindu right attempts to establish the superiority of Hindu religion over others, because traditional systems of medicine are essentially cultural systems closely associated with the metaphysics of (usually) a specific religion.

The second question is, why should we bother about ISM? Collectively, ISM elicits a spectrum of reactions (from complete distrust to complete faith), inspired not only by an experience of these systems, but equally by the ideological hegemony of biomedicine since the colonial period. While statistics reveal that a majority of people use these systems rather than biomedicine, the reasons are quite complex. Often it is because they do not have access to biomedical

facilities (research shows that a larger number of people would rather opt for biomedical treatment). At the same time, a considerable proportion of people trust the Indian systems, particularly from among the rural population. Much of the urban populace too turns to them when biomedicine fails.

Besides, India is one the richest regions in terms of its biodiversity, which constitutes the base of all the systems of medicine that have flourished here. Over centuries, a great fund of cognitive resource, knowledge base and skill has developed, with distinctive perspectives on the body and medical intervention. The equation of modern medicine with *the* knowledge and practice of medicine, reflects little more than sheer arrogance.

The web page of the department of ISM referred to earlier, claims, 'As a matter of fact, ISM policy has been evolving gradually in response to widely varying socio-political situations and the changing health needs of the country (<[www.nic.in/ismh](http://www.nic.in/ismh)> 1997).' This is indeed ironic, for if there is something that the state has not done, it is precisely this.

**U**ntil the beginning of the planning period in the '50s, there was a positive perception about the Indian systems among policy-makers – that the ISM had long been practiced by people in this country reflecting faith and belief; that its pharmacological basis lay in the rich biodiversity of the country, a factor which could help make medicinal formulations both cheap and easily accessible; even more that its emphasis was on ensuring a healthy lifestyle and prevention of disease. For all these reasons it was believed that these systems had the potential to provide a support base for public health in this country.

The Bhore and Chopra committees, both legacies of the colonial state,

however suggested that modern medicine be given pride of place. In this way the new nation state could establish its scientific credentials by embarking on a health service based on the biomedical system developed in the West. At the same time, there were conflicts within the Congress between the powerful lobbies representing traditional and modern medicine (Brass 1972). Gandhi too would not allow a denial of the pride and faith that Indians felt in their indigenous systems of medicine. What emerged then was a compromise; a public health system based on both allopathy and the indigenous systems of medicine, but structured in a particular hierarchical order.

**T**he major focus was on providing 'modern medicine' to a deprived Indian population while the indigenous systems were accorded their 'rightful' place by bringing them up to date with scientific developments. Given the overall commitment of the post-colonial Indian state to a 'scientific temper', the hegemonic relationship between allopathy and the others as the dominant *ideological orientation* of the state was established early on (Banerjee 1995: 130-147).

The marginalisation of the ISM was effected in three ways. First, the allocation of resources between allopathic and other systems was completely disproportionate. The total allocation was raised from Rs 35 crore last year to Rs 100 crore this year and this announcement drew applause from the starved ISM sector. But the not-so-fine print is that the total allocation for the Ministry of Health this year is Rs 4319 crore, and ISM gets a mere 2.5% of the whole! A clear reflection of the marginalisation of the Indian systems of medicine in the public health care system.

Second, there was an attempt to 'translate' these systems into methods

of teaching, marketing and production followed in biomedicine, since the public health arena involved all three aspects. The argument advanced *ad nauseam* was that for these systems were to be taken as seriously as biomedicine, an equivalent five-year degree course, as comprehensive as the basic medical education required for a bachelor's degree the world had come to recognise, needed to be fashioned. Equally, that mass produced indigenous medicines would have to be subjected to rigorous quality testing such that their 'value' could be established in terms understood by the pharmaceutical industry. This demanded a process of standardizing; though both the procedures of preparation and testing were already laid down in great detail in the texts and practices of yore, they needed to be 'translated' to contemporaneity. In state parlance, this meant constituting committees and inviting long depositions from different factions. The outcome: ambivalent results vis-à-vis actual procedure, not to mention interminable delays.

**T**he third strategy involved 'replicating' the apparatus of the dominant biomedical system in the Indian systems of medicine and homoeopathy. This not only meant hospitals, dispensaries and units manufacturing medicine, just as in the biomedical system, but also that the resource allocation would be in the same proportion. This meant foregrounding big, centralised health care centres or hospitals (necessarily implying a great deal of expenditure on a few institutions) at the expense of the smaller, basic and dispersed primary health care centres, accessible (by definition) to a large number of people.

Though designed to signal that the government treated all the systems at par, the process resulted in both the

marginalisation of a decentralised system of health care and a sidelining the perspective of treatment in the Indian systems which is based on examining and treating a person in entirety rather than focusing on specific ailments. If only ISM could have become part of active health policy, it might have helped balance the excesses of the biomedical system (which too was being developed at the cost of its own epidemiological dimensions).

**T**he market arena took cognisance of indigenous medicine systems during the colonial period itself. Medicines prepared on the basis of non-modern Indian systems first entered the modern market in the late 19th century. The challenge they faced was of both of form and content because the new medicines, though expensive, were easy-to-pop pills claiming miraculous results.

The USP of traditional medicines was that they were inexpensive as they were made of locally available natural materials. Besides they were familiar, as people had relied on them for long. ISM could thus claim greater legitimacy despite the advances reported by biomedicine, in turn leading to mass production of Ayurvedic and other medicines. The outcome was companies like Dabur and Arya Vaidya Sala Kottakkal. The results of modern mass production were manifold. In the modern context what is significant is that it helped structure the identity of both the medicines and the systems of which they were a part.

In the early phase of modernisation the distinct contribution of the market was in terms of two features of modern mass production – standardisation and commercialisation of medicines. Standardisation involved making medicines of uniform quality.

While some standards were legal requirements laid down by governments, in the main they were based on the companies' perceptions of what would increase their credibility in the market. Commercialisation involved three processes: packaging, positioning and advertising, just like for any other commodity in the modern market (for a detailed discussion, see Banerjee 1995: 158-180). In visible terms this meant that indigenous medicines were available in chemist shops that sold *angrezi* medicines, even in cities far away from the point of production. Also, that they were advertised in the media through wall writing, newspapers, pamphlets, even banners on elephants!

**T**heir virtues could now be enunciated and comparisons made with biomedicine in the new language and mode of advertising. The most important benefit of mass production was, however, that of returns to scale. The expectation was that over time indigenous medicines would cost less, making them accessible to ordinary people.

But the last 100 years of mass production has seen more powerful and subtler developments. The institutional consolidation of the indigenous systems has, however, been fraught with controversy, resulting in a decline of the value of the systems *qua* systems. Though a larger number of people today use these medicines, fewer people now look for treatment in the Indian systems of medicine. Though apparently improbable, this is a result of both a transformation of the medicines in themselves and their subsequent appropriation by allopaths. Companies began to produce medicines based on traditional formulations, but in the contemporary form of tablets, capsules and syrups. This adoption of a new form as also the fact that these medicines were

now being tested in clinical trials similar to those involving biomedical formulations is what enabled companies to sell them to allopaths.

**A**llopaths were encouraged to use indigenous medicines to complement, rather than to substitute, their line of treatment. Considering that this permitted an appreciation of the value of biomedical treatment without disturbing its basics, it appealed to allopaths who used them with great success. And given that the allopathic practice of medicine was both more visible and powerful than the indigenous systems, the new form gained strength. This process is best described as *pharmaceuticalisation*, i.e., using the pharmacology of these systems to create new pharmaceuticals, or medicinal commodities, that could be sold independently of the original line of treatment (an idea hinted at in Nandy and Visvanathan 1990: 170).

In combination, the processes of standardisation, commercialisation and pharmaceuticalisation fostered by the market have substantially changed the profile of the ISM in the arena of health. We have here an apparent paradox. While these processes have conferred a new legitimacy on traditional systems, their radical transformation has meant that even as their face-value has appreciated, their innate importance as systems of healing has declined. Indigenous medicines manufactured in traditional ways and forms are usually expensive and not always trustworthy in the ingredients they use. No wonder, some of the most cherished dreams of the modernisation of the Indian systems of medicine remain unfulfilled. The medicines prepared in accordance with classical texts and procedures are not meant for the ordinary and the poor; those which are

mass produced are affordable but rarely conform to the best standards.

The most damning impact has been on the role of ISM in public health. While the private market for ISM has expanded, its presence in the public health system has shrunk. The government has made no concerted attempt to ensure production of affordable, quality medicines to counter market trends.

In the last decade or so we can trace three developments which, though unrelated, have significantly affected the Indian medicine sector: (i) The Indian economy has changed tracks in terms of its orientation towards the international economy and has become 'liberalised'. (ii) A new wave in the international economy, 'globalisation' in the shorthand of our times, has created a new trading regime, the World Trade Organisation. (iii) There is a renewed surge of interest in traditional/folk/indigenous peoples' medicine in Europe and the United States. What is pertinent is that, unlike before, both state and market have responded positively and in tandem.

**A** direct consequence is that the processes of standardisation, commercialisation and pharmaceuticalisation may take a different direction and orientation altogether. The growing interest in traditional medicine in the West has excited Indian manufacturers, who see in this a massive export potential. Given their long experience in manufacturing such medicines that are now suddenly in demand, this is not an unfair expectation. But the reality has proved otherwise.

The quality control requirements of both the European Union and the Food and Drug Administration of the United States are not easy to fulfil. They demand extensive clinical

trials with large sample sizes, just as for all biomedical products. A big company like Dabur has conducted clinical trials on traditional medicines in traditional forms for many years now, while the Himalaya Drug Company has done the same for Ayurvedic proprietary medicines. But even for them, the requirements of successful operation in the western markets appear daunting.

**H**owever, there are better chances of selling herbal products as 'food supplements' and not as medicines since the law in this case is far less stringent. Also, this is a market big enough to attract Indian manufacturers. In the event, Indian companies could demonstrate great market potential and ability to become players in the 'global' context. In the current climate of liberalisation, this could not only get them incentives from the state, but enable them to claim that they were upholding the glory of Indian tradition!

Not that these companies will stop producing Ayurvedic medicines as such. But, as has been the trend for some time, they will increasingly concentrate on products which can be positioned, packaged and marketed in a specific way to meet the requirement of a new burgeoning consumer class that can both afford and see value in traditional healing forms. The pharmaceuticalisation process too will continue, though it would be subjected to continuous modification. An interesting extension of this concept, already underway, involves investments in health farms and luxury type health/holiday resorts.

Further, in anticipation of this new trend in European and American markets, many transnational pharmaceutical companies have opened up new divisions to create 'herbal' formulations. This has increased the

demand for medicinal plants as raw material. There already exists an old and wide network of markets for medicinal plants in this country. Existing laws also require certain conditions of transportation and storage to be fulfilled before they are used to make medicines. In reality, however, the standardisation of raw materials has been a somewhat neglected sphere of activity. With independent potential being discovered in terms of an export market, a new dimension to standardisation has emerged. It does appear likely that investment in this part of the process would yield substantial returns, considering the growing demand for these products in the international market.

**B**oth these developments link to what this paper began with—the newfound interest of the private sector in the Indian systems of medicine and the emerging tie-ups between government and industry, hitherto unheard of. Industry needs the government to set norms for production such that the definitions of proprietary medicine in ISM can be expanded to include food supplements as well and, of course, for export incentives. Second, it needs a regularisation of the medicinal plants market, so far completely informal, such that it becomes easier for local industry to meet global market standards. The government on the other hand is under pressure from the biodiversity conservation lobby to avert a continuous depletion of both the plant base as also the knowledge base. It also needs to identify new avenues to plug into the international economy. No wonder the prime minister announced the constitution of a Medicinal Plants Board (presumably a regulatory and scientific body) besides the already existing central scheme for development and cultivation of medicinal plants, expressing a

clear intention to promote the interest of industry.

**T**he poor hardly stand to gain from these developments. A primary achievement of the growth of the market is an extension of choice. But, by definition, this choice can be exercised only by those who are part of the market in the first place. The idea behind encouraging manufacturing companies to get into traditional medicines was to make them available at a low price to those who could not afford expensive modern medicines. The aim of the public health system was to extend the choice of alternatives to those who did not have *any* to begin with. Unfortunately, after fifty years, both the public health system and the market have failed a majority of people in the country.

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# Innovations in Tamil Nadu

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THE demographic transition of Kerala state in India has been widely acclaimed not only because its mortality and fertility levels have reached those of developed countries of the world, but also because the achievement has been possible despite the low level of Kerala's economic development. Kerala's success is largely attributed to high literacy levels among women and men, and relatively higher status and high age at marriage of women. The neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu, on the other hand, has managed to accomplish a feat similar to that of Kerala in fertility decline in a much shorter time span and without the same level of educational attainment or decline in mortality.

According to the Sample Registration Survey data for the year 1997, the total fertility rate (TFR), or the average number of children born to a woman during her reproductive period, was 1.9 in Kerala and 2.0 in Tamil Nadu.<sup>1</sup> The reasons for rapid fertility decline in Tamil Nadu from a TFR of around 3.8 in the mid-70s to 2 now need to be fully explored for their relevance to other regions of the country that are socially and economically more akin to Tamil Nadu than Kerala.

Many social scientists and policy-makers have attempted to iden-

tify the factors contributing to rapid decline in fertility in Tamil Nadu. Some of the factors identified are: high levels of industrialisation; infrastructural development, especially transport network (Padmanabha 1995); social reform movements<sup>2</sup> (Ramasundaram 1995, Srinivasan 1995, Kulkarni, et al. 1996); efficient family welfare programmes (Anthony 1992); influence of mass media (Bhat 1996); changing parental aspirations for better life for children in spite of relatively high infant and child mortality (Krishnamoorthy, et al. 1998, Ravindran 1998).

It has also been suggested that a high level of poverty in the state is responsible for lowering fertility (Kishor 1994). In addition, awareness about continuous land fragmentation between sons making cultivation in small parcels of land non-viable, has reportedly led to desire one living son who would inherit the land. Additional sons would have to opt for non-farm employment, which has not grown rapidly enough to absorb all those available for work. The Tamil couples seem to have responded to these

1. The infant mortality rate, which is a good sensitive indicator of the health status of the population, was only 19 in Kerala compared to nearly 60 per thousand live births in Tamil Nadu. Female literacy rates in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, according to the 1991 Census data, were 86 and 51% respectively.

2. The social awareness movement in Tamil Nadu was started in the 1930s by a social reformer 'Periyar' Ramasamy (E.V. Ramasamy Naicker), who rejected the Brahmanical religion and the practice of untouchability. He recognised the need to raise the status of women and advocated increase in age at marriage of women and acceptance of a small family norm. The movement attracted people from backward and scheduled castes and influenced the ideology of a political party (Dravida Kazhagam) that is dominated by members of non-Brahmin groups.

changes and modified their fertility behaviour.

According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), conducted in major states of India during 1992-93, rural Tamil households are poorer than rural all-India households on most economic indicators (ownership of land, assets such as milch animals, bicycle, television). And yet, in spite of relative deprivation, proportionately more members of Tamil households are able to access news or entertainment in the form of watching films than is the case at all-India level (Table 1). The exposure to mass media may indeed be an important factor in increasing the awareness about alternatives available to people and creating a demonstration effect. The relatively large size of villages in Tamil Nadu makes provision of services such as cinemas, public bus transport and health care by private practitioners much more viable for the providers and accessible to the people.<sup>3</sup>

**T**he analyses undertaken by social scientists and others to understand fertility decline in Tamil Nadu have, however, largely ignored the steady but slow changes that the state has introduced in the overall health care delivery system. The widespread accessibility of reasonably good quality health care, including family planning services, has helped people attain their desired fertility goal.

The state is better prepared than most others in implementing many components of the reproductive health programme that India launched in October 1997 following the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development. For example,

**TABLE 1**  
**Selected Characteristics of Households and Population of Tamil Nadu and All-India**  
(according to NFHS, 1992-93)

Characteristics	Tamil Nadu	India
% of rural households with some land	41.1	64.0
% of rural households owning less than one acre of land	29.2	25.5
% of rural households owning any animals	38.8	67.0
% of rural households owning bicycle/motorcycle/scooter	37.9	43.5
% of rural households owning radio/television	33.6	40.5
% of rural households with electricity	55.1	38.7
% of households watching television at least once a week	50.4	31.8
% of households listening to the radio at least once a week	59.7	43.5
% of households visiting a cinema/theatre at least once a month	42.6	15.0

Sources: International Institute of Population Sciences, 1995. *National Family Health Survey, India*, Mumbai, p. 62, 70.

National Family Health Survey (NFHS) (MCH and Family Planning), 1994. *Tamil Nadu, 1992*, pp. 38, 44.

even before the GOI announced the removal of method-specific family planning targets in major states in 1995 and from the entire country in 1996, Tamil Nadu government had removed targets assigned to non-health personnel in the district of North Arcot as early as 1991-92. This could happen because the district collectors in Tamil Nadu, with the support of political leaders, assumed responsibility for the performance of the family planning programme and were able to introduce changes at the local level based on their assessment of the situation.

The North Arcot experiment indicated that even when the non-health personnel were not involved in promoting family planning, performance did not decline. In fact, it boosted the morale of health workers who were rewarded for their work and not someone else who did not engage in any motivational work with prospective clients. Also, at monthly meetings conducted in the presence of the district magistrate, health workers could articulate their problems, seek clarifications and receive guidance. In spite of the fact that the targets were centrally determined and the state could not alter the methodology of target

fixing, the administrative participation in the programme in Tamil Nadu was substantial even prior to 1994.

This paper describes some of the positive measures adopted by the state of Tamil Nadu in order to draw out some programmatic lessons for implementers of health delivery in other states of the country. Finally, some of the measures that are yet to be addressed and the challenges that Tamil Nadu state faces are listed for future action.

Recruitment of Medical Officers: A major social change introduced in Tamil Nadu relates to the implementation of affirmative action or the reservation policy in the provision of higher education with strong state-level political support. As a result, in the past 40 years higher professional education has become available to those belonging to middle castes and classes from district towns. Consequently, a cadre of doctors has been created in the state that has roots in small towns and is willing to work in primary health centres located in rural areas at commuting distance.<sup>4</sup>

Further, many medical graduates from small towns or rural areas do

4. A visit to the primary health centres in the state would convince anybody that many

3 Compared to 67% of India's villages, only 31% of villages in Tamil Nadu had less than 1000 population according to the 1991 Census data.



not enjoy the luxury of spending several years specialising in some advanced branch of medicine or have the necessary resources to set up private practice requiring relatively heavy investment in equipment. The alternatives before them are either to become general practitioners or to take up government jobs that ensure a steady income. Many young doctors from district towns or rural areas prefer the latter option.

**T**he Tamil Nadu government has also made employment as medical officers in the primary health centres attractive on several counts. One, it allows private practice by medical officers under certain conditions.<sup>5</sup> Two, 50% of the postgraduate seats in all branches of medicine are reserved for those doctors who have completed a minimum three years of service in the primary health centres or district hospitals. Three, 15% of the seats for medicine (leading to MBBS degree) and the dental (leading to BDS degree) courses are reserved for students from rural schools.<sup>6</sup> This is expected to increase the retention of medical officers in rural areas and assumes that persons coming from a rural background would have little problem in being posted there.

Lastly, doctors are recruited on a zonal basis. Tamil Nadu is divided into nine zones, with each zone comprising of two to three districts. Doctors are recruited through the Tamil

Nadu Public Service Commission to work in the zone in which their residence is located for a minimum period of 10 years. Even after five years of completion of service in the primary health centres (PHC), the medical officer is placed in the same zone when released to work in a hospital (Government of Tamil Nadu, 1998c).

During my visit to the departments of health and of family welfare in Chennai in early 1998, I was informed that nearly 40-45% of medical officers in the PHCs were women. The presence of women doctors has helped rural women in Tamil Nadu in accessing not only family planning services but general health care for themselves much more easily than was the case in the north Indian state of Rajasthan (Visaria and Visaria 1998). According to medical officers interviewed at the primary health centres in Tamil Nadu, many women patients visited the centres for reproductive health problems. Also, a large proportion of PHCs in Tamil Nadu have two medical officers unlike in many other parts of the country.<sup>7</sup>

**L**ogistic management of drugs: To strengthen the logistics management system of health care, the Government of Tamil Nadu has established a Tamil Nadu Medical Services Corporation (TNMSC). Registered under the Companies Act, 1956 on 1 July 1994 as a government company, it became functional in January 1995. It serves as an apex body for the purchase, storage and distribution of high quality drugs, medicines, sutures and surgical instruments for various government medical institutions in the state. It also renders other services like supplying equipment to hospitals and maintaining its own CT scan centres

7. The number of lady doctors employed in PHCs, and the number of PHCs with two doctors are not readily available. However, the

in the premises of a few government hospitals.

**T**he TNMSC consults the WHO list of rational drugs and finalises every year the list of drugs and medicines required by government medical institutions in the state. It takes into consideration the recommendations of a committee set up for the purpose.<sup>8</sup> The number of drugs on its list varies from year to year based on the requirements of the medical institutions. Open tenders invited from reputed manufacturers are processed in a systematic manner. Drugs are made available at highly competitive rates by suppliers finalised by the corporation. Processing, placement and distribution of orders of drugs to the PHCs and dispensaries is done using the computer network.

Quality is given utmost importance in purchasing drugs and medicines by the establishment of a quality control wing, headed by a qualified professional. Samples from the warehouses are sent for analytical testing to laboratories of national repute. The entire batch that fails the test is rejected. Due importance is given to packaging as well.<sup>9</sup>

To facilitate storage and distribution of medicines, 23 warehouses, with two pharmacists each, were

information was provided by the state demographer during a visit to the Directorate of Health Services in January 1998. He also indicated that government employment as a medical officer is a desired posting among new graduates and, as a result, there is a waiting period of about a year between selection and actual posting.

8. The committee consists of the director, medical and rural health services, the director of medical education, the director of public health and preventive medicine and the managing director of the TMNSC.

9. During visits to several PHCs in two districts in 1998, it was a pleasant surprise to note that even iron and folic acid tablets were blister packed and not handed to pregnant women as loose tablets on a piece of paper.

medical officers have non-Brahmanical backgrounds and are very similar to that of many rural patients in dress, mannerism, language, as well as overall values and attitudes.

5. The medical officers cannot set up private nursing homes, nor can they conduct private practice from within the premises of the government health centres.

6. The Tamil Nadu government bears the full cost of medical education of the first 20 students in the merit list from families that do not have any graduates.

established. The warehouses stock at least a minimum of three months requirement. Each item in the warehouse is monitored at the headquarters through a computer network on a day-to-day basis. A passbook system has been introduced for the withdrawal of medicines by government medical institutions, including the PHCs, from the district drug warehouses. Under this system, each institution is given a passbook with a specific number indicating the value of drugs which could be drawn pre-printed on the passbook (Government of Tamil Nadu, 1998a, pp.153-156).

During field visits, we received positive and satisfactory reports about the availability of drugs at the primary health centres. The medical officers reported receiving drugs normally within four days of their request. They use the brochure supplied by the TNMSC to prepare a list of drugs to be ordered and to estimate costs. The doctors at the PHCs also have a certain discretion (around 10% of the total allowance for medicines) to buy drugs from the market that are either not on the list or needed for an emergency.<sup>10</sup>

**I**nvolvement of various stakeholders: The Tamil Nadu government has taken certain proactive measures to involve the corporate sector in improving the health infrastructure and provide better services to the people. Thus, industrialists are encouraged to adopt and maintain primary health centres and government hospitals in the state at their cost. A special cell in the secretariat processes their requests. Three models of adoption

have been suggested to the industrialists. One is total adoption where the full cost of running a PHC or taluk/district hospital (including salary of the staff, cost of drugs, purchase of equipment, civil work and maintenance, repairs and construction of staff quarters), are met by the industrial house. The second model is partial adoption where the industrial house meets all costs except staff salaries. The third limited adoption model involves provision of civil work, maintenance and repairs and provision of equipment. Upto March 1998, 15 industrialists had agreed to maintain 60 PHCs and several applications were pending with the cell in the secretariat.<sup>11</sup>

**T**he Tamil Nadu government has also actively involved the *donor community* in its quest for health for all. The state has received assistance from several donors, chief among them being DANIDA. A part of their health care project funds are being used to conduct district level surveys to estimate infant mortality rates and other fertility and mortality measures (Government of Tamil Nadu, 1998b).<sup>12</sup> The grant-in-aid from the Government of Japan has helped to strengthen the Chennai-based Institute of Child Health and Hospital for Children in

the form of medical equipment and instruments for various departments. In addition, under the RCH project, World Bank grant funds are being used, among other things, for providing laboratory facilities at several PHCs for detection of reproductive tract infections and sexually transmitted infections (RTI/STI).

Above all, the state government is making significant investments in building the infrastructure of a health care service delivery system. There is a concerted effort to construct primary health centres and sub-centres in the areas where they are run from rented buildings and to upgrade rural dispensaries as primary health centres and some of the PHCs to community health centres by sanctioning additional staff and providing the needed facilities.<sup>13</sup>

**I**ncentive system: The Tamil Nadu government has introduced a reward and incentive system that operates at both the individual and community level, and is applicable for the providers and clients. A woman health worker who ensures that there is no infant death during a year in her area, will be rewarded with a gold sovereign. At the district level, the medical officer of a PHC registering the highest percent reduction in infant mortality rate in the area will get a rolling shield. The collector of a district will also receive a rolling shield for achieving maximum reduction in IMR in the district.

Further, in order to reduce deliveries by untrained personnel, the woman health worker (known as vil-

11. A visit to one such partially adopted PHC in Chengalpattu district vividly demonstrated what difference the industrial house made to the infrastructural facilities. A compound wall was constructed around the PHC premises. Around an old neem tree, circular-sitting space was built for patients and their relatives. An overhead water tank was also built to provide drinking water.

12. DANIDA has assisted the Tamil Nadu government since 1981 to improve the health and family welfare status of the weaker sections of rural population in the project area. The funding is provided on a reimbursement basis, with 85% borne by DANIDA, 5% by the Government of India and the remaining 10% by the Government of Tamil Nadu. The project is now in its third phase (upto 2002) and covers four districts.

13. By the end of 1997, out of 8682 sub-centres in the state, 5572 functioned from their own buildings. The construction of the remaining sub-centres has been taken up in a phased manner under various schemes such as Hill Area Development Programme, Decentralised District Plan (see, Government of Tamil Nadu, 1998a, p. 81).

10. Himachal Pradesh has also introduced a similar drug procurement system. The Government of India has recently recommended other states to adopt this system of providing medicines and other supplies to the government medical institutions.

lage health nurse, VHN, in Tamil Nadu) is paid Rs 50 for conducting a delivery at home in the rural areas. Also, VHNs are encouraged to refer complicated pregnancies to higher levels of care and are paid Rs 25 for timely referral. In order to cover the entire sub-centre area regularly, VHNs are given an advance for purchasing a cycle or two-wheeler.

**I**ncreased availability of health services: To improve the availability of services, the Tamil Nadu government has introduced a 24-hour service in several primary health centres. To begin with, the block level PHCs are being upgraded to function for 24 hours a day to provide delivery care to rural populace. At the end of 1997-98, there were 250 PHCs that functioned as 24 hour centres (Government of Tamil Nadu, 1998c). Efforts are underway to upgrade the remaining block level PHCs as well. The problems of the staff are being tackled by hiring additional VHNs on a contractual basis and providing living accommodation to those who work night shifts.

Most of the day and night PHCs have been provided with an ambulance to be available for emergency obstetric care.<sup>14</sup> Diagnostic facilities for RTIs/STIs are being improved by strengthening laboratories at the primary health centres. To facilitate delivery, labour rooms have been constructed where none exist and upgraded or repaired where they were non-functional. This measure will reduce the load on district-level hospitals and more beds at the secondary

level facilities will become available for emergency and complicated cases.

As part of the revamped reproductive and child health programme, the Tamil Nadu government has identified certain state-specific objectives for immediate action. They are, lowering infant mortality and morbidity, eliminating female infanticide, lowering maternal morbidity, reducing suffering due to reproductive tract infections and sexually transmitted infections, improving abortion services and improving quality of health care. A number of them are being carefully monitored through the on-going reporting systems as well as through special surveys. There is, however, a need for more focused and concerted effort to address some of the following issues.

**L**imited contraceptive choice: A major challenge in Tamil Nadu, as in the rest of the country, is the excessive focus on female sterilisation. According to NFHS data, as against 96% of respondent women knowing about the places where services about female sterilisation were available, only 60% knew the source of supply for oral pills and IUDs. Also, 87% of currently married women using a modern method of family planning relied on female sterilisation (IIPS, 1995). The situation seems to have accentuated further because during 1995-96, 99.9% of all sterilisations were female sterilisations according to the service statistics published by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (Department of Family Welfare, 1997, p. 95).

The age at sterilisation has also been decreasing in Tamil Nadu as it has in the country. The median age at sterilisation in Tamil Nadu, according to NFHS data, was 26 years as against 27 for the country as a whole. It was only 25 years for women who were sterilised two years prior to the survey

(NFHS, Tamil Nadu, 1994, p.89). Also, 87% of all sterilised Tamil women opted for tubal ligation, conducted soon after the delivery of a child, rather than for the simpler laparoscopic sterilisation. (For the country as a whole, this proportion was 65%. The other major state where tubectomy is popular is Andhra Pradesh, with nearly 98% of all female sterilisations conducted by ligation of tubes. See, Department of Family Welfare, 1997, p. 97.) The reasons for such heavy dependence on a single method need to be ascertained.

Clearly, there is a need to expand the options available to couples in order to lessen the disproportionate share of the burden of fertility limitation that is placed on women. The programme needs to take into account women's compulsions and ascertain the reasons why they opt for sterilisation. Efforts to increase awareness and accessibility of other methods of contraception and to dispel the fear of their side effects must be increased. Introduction of new technology in the programme by training doctors in non-scalpel vasectomy, thereby making it available on a larger scale, must receive priority.

**I**nfant mortality: Although the infant mortality rate (IMR) in Tamil Nadu (53 deaths per 1000 live births according to the 1997 Sample Registration System) is lower than the national average of 72, it is significantly higher than that of Kerala (14). More importantly, infant mortality rate in Tamil Nadu continues to show significant rural-urban disparity, with IMR of 60 in rural areas and 39 in urban areas. The detailed district-level infant mortality data available from a special survey conducted in rural Tamil Nadu in 1996 also exhibit some disturbing features that need to be addressed with special focused programmes.<sup>15</sup>

14. The present Tamil Nadu government purchased some ambulances for the PHCs and hospitals from the sale proceeds of an aircraft used by the former chief minister. (Successive governments have shown a knack for impressing the people of the state through such pro-people gestures.) See, Government of Tamil Nadu, 1998b, pp. 10-11

One of the disturbing features is the large inter-district variation in the level of infant mortality. According to the 1996 survey data, the reported range in IMR was between 18.5 in Kanyakumari district and 98.1 in Dharmapuri district. In fact, the three districts of Dharmapuri, Madurai and Salem reported an IMR higher than the all-India rural average of 80. A second disturbing feature is an exceptionally high female IMR. Again, the districts of Dharmapuri, Madurai and Salem reported female IMR of 131, 100 and 96 respectively, with corresponding male IMR of 69, 69 and 67. (For the state as a whole, male and female infant mortality rates were 52.7 and 57.3.) Third, early neonatal deaths are persistently high and have shown a tendency to rise in recent years. Tamil Nadu's early neonatal mortality rate rose from 33.8 in 1971 to 37.8 in 1993.

**T**he sex differentials in early neonatal deaths are also striking in some districts. According to the 1996 district level survey, early neonatal death rate in Dharmapuri district was 105 for girls as against 47 for boys (Chunkath and Athreya 1998). These statistics indicate that programmatic interventions have to be planned at a micro level in order to be effective. Also, the reporting systems of districts with a high female infant mortality must be strengthened along with undertaking some micro level studies to understand the underlying socio-cultural

practices and the reasons for divergent patterns.

**F**emale infanticide: The practice of female infanticide is believed to be a cause of large sex differentials in early infant deaths in some districts of Tamil Nadu. According to the 1996 district survey, female infanticide accounted for 8% of infant deaths and 16% of female infant deaths. It is estimated that around 3500 to 4000 female infants are killed in Tamil Nadu every year. According to primary health centre records for 1995, a total of 3,226 female infants deaths as opposed to 162 male infant deaths were reported 'due to social cause' (Chunkath and Athreya 1997). Nearly 85% of these deaths occurred in three districts of Dharmapuri, Salem and Madurai and were probably cases of infanticide. In fact, according to the 1996 survey, female infanticide accounted for more than half (59%) of all female infant deaths in Dharmapuri and for 54 and 33% in Madurai and Salem districts respectively (Chunkath and Athreya 1998).

Unlike other states of India such as Bihar or Madhya Pradesh, where the practice of female infanticide is also known to exist, the Tamil Nadu government has recognised that this practice exists in some districts of the state. In addition to legal action, the practice demands urgent social intervention by the state and civil society (George 1997). Documentation, networking among concerned NGOs, social activists and the state are recommended by many working to check the practice of female infanticide.<sup>15</sup> However, the related practices of violation of foetal Sex Determination Act and of

<sup>15</sup> A recent issue of *Search Bulletin*, with Sabu George as guest editor, is devoted to female infanticide and includes several thought provoking articles by social activists, researchers and bureaucrats. *Search Bulletin - Female Infanticide* 13(3), July-September 1997

female foeticide, that are reportedly becoming more popular in the state, need urgent attention.

**Abortion services:** Another major concern closely related to the reproductive health of women, is the large-scale use of abortion as a method of family planning in Tamil Nadu. Accurate data on the number or rate of abortions is difficult to obtain or estimate in spite of abortion being legal in the country for nearly 20 years. However, if the NFHS data on pregnancy outcomes is any guide to information on abortion, then both spontaneous and induced abortion rates are among the highest in Tamil Nadu (Andhra Pradesh also exhibits similar rates). In India as a whole, 1.3 and 4.5% of all pregnancies reportedly resulted in induced and spontaneous abortions. In Tamil Nadu, on the other hand, the comparable figures were 4.3 and 7.0% (IIPS 1995, p.102; NFHS, Tamil Nadu 1994, p.63).

**T**he statistics compiled by the Directorate of Family Welfare of the Government of Tamil Nadu, indicate that the number of abortions performed in government institutions has hovered around 22,000 a year since 1994-95. In the earlier period, a steady decline in numbers was noted although the number of clinics approved for conducting abortions or medical termination of pregnancies (MTPs) had risen by more than four times in 13 years between 1980 and 1993. Quite likely, many abortions go unrecorded in official statistics.

Of the official abortions, the share of government sector (government hospitals and urban health posts, and primary health centres) varied between 55 and 60%. Private nursing homes accounted for the rest of abortions performed. In reality, many unregistered doctors perform abortions in the state. A disturbing fact is that

15. The Sample Registration System provides estimates of vital rates at state level only. Its sample size does not permit district level estimates. However, the Directorate of Public Health of Tamil Nadu conducted a survey in rural areas in early 1996, covering 10.4 lakh rural households or roughly one-sixth of all rural households in the state to obtain district level estimates of birth rate, death rate and infant mortality rate. (See, Chunkath and Athreya 1998)

more than 90% of the abortions performed in the government sector were permanent sterilisation as against only around one half in the case of private nursing homes. The insistence in government institutions on permanent sterilisations along with abortion violates women's right to reproductive choice and also drives women to unsafe and, perhaps, fatal abortion in the hands of quacks. There is an urgent need to delink abortion services from provision of permanent methods of contraception. Further, attention needs to be paid to good counselling and encouraging women to use other methods of contraception rather than resort to abortion. The mothers' meetings organised by VHNs in the villages should be an important platform to discuss issues of reproductive health, including abortion.

**T**he Tamil Nadu government is making a concerted effort to tackle maternal mortality by encouraging institutional deliveries through providing labour rooms in the PHCs, keeping health centres open 24 hours with a nurse available on the premises, and providing essential emergency obstetric care to complicated cases. However, overall poverty, high anaemic conditions of women, often resulting in low birth weight of newborn babies, are complex issues that are difficult to address in the short run through programmatic interventions. They require larger societal changes and support of social activists, NGOs as well as the government machinery.

The Tamil Nadu government is aware about the burden of RTIs and STIs that women face. However, the immediate priorities are somewhat different. The health delivery system has yet to gear up to provide services to tackle STIs and RTIs among women and men. The VHNs are aware of the problems but unable to provide

satisfactory answers to women, apart from recommending some private care provider. Another major area that has yet to be addressed is the health needs, including reproductive health needs, of young people. In coordination with the education department, the issue has yet to be addressed for school-going youth by providing basic scientifically correct knowledge about the human reproductive system.

**O**verall, the narration clearly suggests that inspite of some unaddressed areas or issues of reproductive health, the Tamil Nadu government has made impressive progress toward providing high quality maternal care and some components of reproductive health care to its people. The attention to ensuring continuity in providing good quality drugs at the peripheral level is also a positive step. The experience of Tamil Nadu does offer lessons to other states in strengthening their health delivery systems and directing their efforts and resources such that they make a difference to the lives of women and men.

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# Books

**DISINVESTING IN HEALTH: The World Bank's Prescriptions for Health** edited by Mohan Rao.  
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1999.

HEALTH care is a public or merit good which no society with a welfare maxim can afford to ignore. Most developing countries have tried to pursue strategies for health care giving primacy to the government's role in financing and delivering these services. The strategies and policies evolved in the past few decades at the national level and the international discussions on health had a common orientation towards the government sector in terms of policy, financing and management. Health care services were largely seen as government entities to which access could be expanded by increasing public investment.

However, with the decline of the Keynesian argument on the need for state intervention in demand management and the orientation towards liberalisation and privatisation under the structural adjustment programmes (SAP) prescribed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank for solving the crises in developing countries in the late 1980s and early 1990s, public investment in social sectors, especially in health, suffered a setback.

The World Development Report of 1993, *Investing in Health*, advocated a three-pronged approach to

government policies for improving health in developing countries. First, governments were required/needed to foster policies that would aim at creating an enabling environment for households to improve health by pursuing economic growth policies that would benefit the poor. Second, government spending on health should be redirected to most cost effective programmes that do more to help the poor. Third, governments need to promote greater diversity and competition in the financing and delivery of health services by facilitating involvement of the private sector. The key elements of these initiatives are: (i) PHCs to restrict their activities to selected areas of prevention of communicable diseases and promotion of family welfare; (ii) curative care to be left to the private sector, and (iii) encouraging the private and voluntary sector in health related activities.

At the outset, the World Development Report 1993 (WDR '93) prescriptions appear to provide the most comprehensive reform package. However, the emphasis on cost effectiveness for allocating government resources as well as the promotion of the private sector in health care, which is a merit good, has raised doubts about the real intentions of the World Bank.

This volume, edited by Mohan Rao, is the product of an intellectual exercise that looks at the World

Bank prescriptions in a critical manner. At a national seminar entitled 'WDR 1993: Investing in Health Implications for Health and Family Welfare in India', held in December '94, scholars and activists from a range of disciplines debated the different aspects of conceptual, methodological and empirical strengths and weakness of WDR '93. The author has put together some of the best scholarship within India in this volume of 15 essays which critically examine the issues related to health care in the context of SAP and WDR '93. This body of work constitutes the first academic critique of the WDR '93 from India.

In his introductory chapter, Mohan Rao emphasises the role of organised public action that is most critical in altering the outlay and impact of the web of factors that determine health. Prabhat Patnaik deals with the political economy of structural adjustment, which had paved the way for the advocacy of reform in the health sector. He criticises WDR '93 for trying to institutionalise dualism in the health sector. The prescription suggests substantial privatisation of the health sector, with a need for public effort to be concentrated in the essential clinical services only, as governments have limited resources. Patnaik criticises this thinking by arguing that the SAP's prescription of liberalisation which seeks to reduce tax rates and other protection is a cause for reduction in government revenues. It is thus not justifiable to ask the developing countries to cut back on their limited resources. A methodological problem raised relates to the classification of clinical services into 'essential' and 'non-essential' as this is arbitrary. To him it is apparent that WDR '93 is an effort by the World Bank to make their reform package socially attractive.

While Patnaik's focus is on interrogating the motive of the World Bank behind its prescriptions and lack of real social concern, Niraja Gopal Jayal discusses the nature of 'welfarism' on which the health policies were supposedly based. The author has attempted to establish the limited welfarist orientation of the Indian state, seen more appropriately as an interventionist one, whose welfarist activities are characterised by inefficiency as well as absence of any concept of welfare as a right. The over-emphasis of the World Bank prescription on cost effectiveness and efficiency seriously dilutes the welfarist concern, while the privatisation agenda takes it to a market orientation which may lead to failures. The World Bank agenda as manifested in WDR '93 would serve to marginalise the welfare centred policies which are already limited in scope.

The way in which the World Bank's interventions have affected India's attitude toward the PHC is the concern of Imrana Qadeer's essay. She focuses on the fact that inspite of the apparent weakness, the World Bank chose to follow a selective instead of a comprehensive PHC approach, thus shifting the focus from the 'process' of intervention to the 'programmes' of intervention, that too with an emphasis on cost effectiveness. The prioritisation of 'essential' clinical services to the private sector has reduced the PHC to primary prevention and promotion activities. 'Clinical management' has thus become the objective of public health of the WDR variety.

Nata Duvury's paper discusses the gender implication of the new economic policies. The privatisation efforts have adversely affected the female work participation rate. They have also affected poverty levels, which have a deeper impact on women. The burden on women at household production of health has been affected by cuts in public expenditure on social sectors including health, under the SAP.

Mohan Rao's paper traces the fact that WDR '93 advocates promotion of family welfare. Any reduction in health expenditure under SAP would seriously affect the family planning programme in India, which according to him has failed to take off despite repeated efforts by the government. The SAP prescriptions would cause a further dent in its performance.

A.K. Shiva Kumar's paper questions WDR '93, which is dominated by efficiency arguments, marginalising the important questions of ethics and equity. He stresses the importance of using both efficiency and equity criteria for evaluating policy options. Three common notions relating to the equality of access to health care services – physical, economic and social access – are discussed in order to show that health reforms to be sustainable, need to be based on a careful assessment of the country's health needs, the overall level of people's entitlements, the effectiveness of current levels of public provisioning of health facilities and the extent to which people are likely to benefit.

Seeta Prabhu's essay is an empirical examination of the consequences of SAP on central and state government's public expenditure, especially on medical and public health. She highlights the decline in real public expenditure on health in the last few years, and emphasises that this would undermine the public sector's role in health care provision.

Rama Baru looks at the structure and utilisation of health services in the Indian states using NSS data.

She shows that a shift towards the private sector and privatisation will lead to greater social and regional inequalities as the private sector provision and spread is uneven and guided by the profit motive.

Amit Sen Gupta's paper analyses the implications of WDR '93 on infrastructure development in health care and the pharmaceutical industry. He sounds a word of caution in following the World Bank's prescriptions for the Indian drug industry. In contrast to the WDR '93 point of view, he argues that to ensure the availability of essential drugs at reasonable rates, state initiative as suggested by the Hathy Committee needs to be sustained.

K.R. Nayar's paper is concerned with the consequences of globalisation for environmental health not only due to 'garbage imperialism' and consumerism, but also because of overall shifts in resource allocation. The WDR '93 emphasises the household micro environment where traditional concerns of environmental health such as water, health and sanitation are listed as important areas of action. Women's empowerment in the context of real life situations facing poor rural women, whose health and access to contraception, which forms a major area of concern even in WDR '93, has been analysed by Arti Sawhney. It is based on experiences in Rajasthan and shows how empowerment of women has been a double edged sword.

N.H. Antia in 'A prescription for health disaster' critiques the World Bank for its insensitivity to the cooperative culture and tradition of non-western societies. He criticises it for advocating privatisation and competition in the health sector in developing countries like India where the private sector is already a dominant provider of profit making curative services. Antia feels that an alternate strategy, taking into consideration local health needs and culture, could emerge under local panchayat raj institutions.

Analysing the experiences in health improvement strategies in developing countries, K.V. Narayana argues that the WDR view of attributing mortality decline in developing countries to technical interventions ignores the social origins of ill-health. Limiting the role of the public to narrowly defined public health programmes is not suitable for a country like India, where a large proportion of the poor access health care from the public sector. Utilising NSS data, T.N. Krishan demonstrates that wide disparities exist in the access to health care in India including variations in the burden of treatment and costs. In this situation, the privatisation strategy advocated by the WDR '93 would be suicidal for a country like India.

The essays in this book represent a pioneering effort aimed at demolishing some 'myths' regarding the prescriptions for reforming the health care sector in developing countries. The 'perceived' quality of private sector and the advocacy by the World Bank for leaving non-essential health services to the private sector has gained acceptance among a wider population. The book attempts to elucidate the political economy of such a policy and criticises the prescriptions for overlooking the welfare aspects of health reforms in the name of efficiency arguments. The fear is that a shift from low cost care through the public sector to a market based model might lead to a widening of disparities in society. The authors, in advocating pro-people health policies, argue that a withdrawal by the state from its commitments forbore poorly for people's health.

Notwithstanding this substantial contribution, the collection is marked by serious shortcomings. None of the essays have analysed why WDR '93 ignored the indigenous systems of medicine, especially in developing countries where they are prevalent. Since India has a developed traditional indigenous bio-medical system, which, if not studied from the point of view of the provision of health care services, should at least have been looked at from the point of view of its contributions to investing in health through the lifestyle, food and cultural aspects. While emphasising the government's role, the book overlooks such aspects of health care.

Second, the book is critical of any kind of privatisation effort. Most developing countries have an active private sector dominating the health sector in its provision and utilisation. While criticising WDR '93, the main argument visible in the book is that the poor do not have the ability to pay for health care in a market situation. Also, while examining any proposal, it is useful to suggest alternatives and this is where the scope of the book is limited. Some contributors do offer suggestions, but most limit themselves to mere criticism.

Another argument forwarded is that government funds are limited because of SAP policies. However, even if the government were to double its revenue, it would not be sufficient to ensure adequate investment for preventive and promotive care, leave alone the entire health sector including curative care. It should be remembered that in the past, an expansion of the private sector helped reduce the burden of curative care services on the public sector. This helped the public sector to concentrate on preventive care services and promotive care.



Fourth, even if the government provides health care services, the burden of illness will affect the people in terms of the working hours lost, dependants, nature of illness, and so on. Therefore, there is no harm in charging user fees for services provided by the government sector from people who have the ability to pay.

Finally, while strongly criticising private sector promotion in health care advocated by WDR '93, the authors are silent as to how the private sector is growing relatively within the health sector, and why people prefer it. Since this collection does not look at the maladies in public sector provision, it fails to make suggestions regarding strategies for improvement.

**Mala Ramanathan and Deepa Sankar**

**DRUG SUPPLY AND USE: Towards a Rational Policy in India** by Anant Phadke. Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1998.

THE book under review attempts to analyse the production pattern of drugs in India, the predominance of irrational drug formulations, and the role of the drug industry and doctors in sustaining this irrationality. The author's association with the Movement for a Rational Drug Policy makes him focus, in part I of the book, on the international track record of the drug industry. Part II of the book reports on a three-year study (1991-93) conducted in the Satara district of Maharashtra.

During the '90s, both the global and national research and policy process were impacted by a utilitarian perspective that employs a consequentialist calculation and comparison of policies to determine which reform will achieve the best results for the least input. This book displays a similar orientation. It starts with the premise that drug production and use in India is irrational, irrespective of whether the drugs are produced by MNCs or by Indian companies. Using evidence from the western world, the first section of the book locates the drug industry within the profit centred market. Anant Phadke underscores the irrationality of the production pattern in India in two ways. First, it does not cater to the needs of the majority of the Indian people. Second, it violates medical principles by producing various irrational, obsolete, hazardous drugs, and their combinations.

In analysing Ayurvedic drug production the author observes the absence of regulations or set standards to judge the quality of the end product marketed as Ayurvedic medicine. Since the method of preparation is of paramount importance in Ayurveda,

any deviation from the method described in an Ayurvedic text is hazardous. Therefore, some mechanism must be instituted to ensure the correct method of preparation. The author believes that there are statutory provisions, like section 33 EED of Drugs and Cosmetic Acts 1940, which would minimise this irrationality. The only problem is to put them into effect, which requires political will.

The drug industry operates on market principles. In a country like India where the vast majority of the Indian population is excluded from this mechanism, the average technical knowledge of the consumer is rather low and technical guidance scarce, the role of government becomes important. Its role is crucial in terms of locating the drug policy in an overall framework of health and health services. So how would banning a few drugs, making some statutory provisions, or providing universal health insurance make any difference? The author's observation that the track record of the drug industry worldwide is not reassuring and that even the FDA of USA does not have sufficient resources to tackle the industry's irrationality, is an eye opener. However, these issues have been examined somewhat tangentially. He does not address issues like why the Indian drug policy is biased in favour of the drug industry? Or why government control, despite experimenting with various versions of drug policies and drug price control orders (DPCOs), has been ineffective?

The book becomes more interesting when it describes how drug action groups lobbied for a rational drug policy. Citing two success stories of drug action groups, AIDAN and DAF, the chapter delineates the impediments in the formation of an effective drug policy that could make available the right kind of medicines at affordable prices to people.

In the chapter devoted to 'irrational drug use by doctors' the author argues that since additional expenses on account of irrational drugs are not borne by doctors, they are not concerned about the financial implications of irrational prescribing. Second, drug companies try to oblige doctors with free gifts, drugs and entertainment.

Undoubtedly, there is massive variation in medical practices. One factor responsible for the deviation from good practice is not poor medical knowledge but poor communication, including negligence in addressing the concerns of patients. It is unlikely that any continuing medical education or an open book examination system containing multiple choice questions would help. Guidelines, regulations and provisions

are no answer. The important issue is whether the clinicians and the public believe in and use them? Another aspect of the problem in need of review is why people are encouraged to use medication even when the side effects are not clearly discernible? Any attempt at a quick-fix answer to these questions is unjustified.

Throughout the book there is the continuing theme about rational medical practice and deviation from it. 'A Study of Drug Use and Supply in Satara District' presented in the second part of the book, places the onus of irrationality of practice primarily on the practitioners. Though one is sympathetic to the central concern of the author, it needs to be recognised that there are serious methodological problems in measuring rationality of medical prescriptions. The author's definition of rationality and his methodology is however questionable. This is mainly due to variations in medical practice, the available infrastructure and facilities, and the type of consumers the practitioners serve in, particularly in their ability to pay, their prevailing health conditions and the problems they are likely to suffer from. Is it scientific to analyse the 'rationality' of a medical prescription without considering the context of medical practice and without appreciating the health beliefs and choices of the patient as a part of the medical process?

Even in the strict domain of biomedical rationality, prescriptions can only be judged on the basis of diagnosis made and medical advice given. It is therefore more important to examine the process of arriving at a diagnosis, specially from such a varied bunch of practitioners. In case of unqualified local practitioners the diagnosis is primarily based on symptoms, as also their experience regarding the patients feedback and affordability. For the qualified practitioner, the diagnosis depends partly on symptoms but also on clinical findings and investigation reports. Equally influential is rapport with the patient. In the public health sector, practitioners diagnoses are heavily influenced by the infrastructural set up, supply of medicine, time constraints, programme records and, of course, the clientele – the poor population. These aspects have not been touched upon in the study. It is difficult to appreciate his elaborate system in which he gives different scores to different prescriptions, even while acknowledging that the criteria he uses are arbitrary.

There is no doubting the author's sincerity and convictions, particularly about the need to deliberate irrationality/rationality. While wider issues are diffi-

cult to tackle, something can be done within the given situation. This is based on the author's calculations that if one translates the irrationalities in drug prescription into the cost of medicines and prevent those irrationalities, the cost reduction would be sufficient to take care of all outdoor patient care, indoor care and even preventive care in a district like Satara (Maharashtra).

India's economic reforms have led to reduced budget provisions for the public health sector. Consequently, the patients have to bear the exorbitant expenditure created by the play of market forces in medical practice. Irrational prescriptions are thus profitable for drug manufacturers. India, whose vast majority lives below the poverty line, can ill-afford such irrationality.

The book, unfortunately, lacks a comprehensive account of the issues related to a rational drug policy. Why is it that the study failed to come up with even one rational prescription? What seems to have been ignored is the fact that it is not the doctors who use medicines. Therefore, the 'rationality' of medical practice has to incorporate the patient's perspective. Second, it needs to be analysed why the drug policy continues to be seen as a part of industrial policy rather than the health policy. Third, there is need for a political economy explanation as to why an egalitarian model of development does not exist which would ensure easy accessibility to the health services for the mass of people. An extensive debate leading to the evolution of a rational drug policy and legitimate health concerns of the people is warranted in the light of questions raised by the book.

Ritu Priya

**IMPLEMENTING A REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AGENDA IN INDIA: The Beginning** edited by Saroj Pachauri. Population Council, New Delhi, 1999.

THE book under review is timely in more ways than one. India has just begun to move away from a target oriented, sterilization based family planning programme to a quality conscious and gender sensitive, reproductive health programme. This is not easy. The early years of change were characterized by a concomitant presence of scepticism, apprehension and misgivings at all levels due to a removal of family planning targets. Demographers (who have played a critical role and greatly influenced programme thrusts in the past) and bureaucrats (both medical and administrative)

have been particularly sceptical of the shift for a variety of reasons. Some of these reactions are borne out of quantitative thinking, hierarchical functioning style typical of bureaucracy and a mindset of control rather than support, and an unrealistic expectation of quick results from a programme which is so radically different from earlier approaches.

Based on carefully chosen articles, Saroj Pachauri has tried to address several issues that constitute the core concerns of the new programme. The book helps to clarify the nature of 'paradigm shift', contextualizes the family planning programme, discusses the operational aspects of programme implementation, and at the same time retains a philosophical and theoretical framework.

The first section (eight articles) deals with the implementation aspects of reproductive health policy. Of these, two are reprinted from other sources whereas the other six have been specially written for this book. Although reflecting the experiences of the early stages of programme implementation, most articles provide compelling evidence and arguments in support of the positive changes taking place under the new regimen. They also argue for a more rigorous and committed implementation of the reproductive health agenda rather than reverting back to the target regime. For example, Khan and Townsend show that family planning programme performance had plateaued and begun to decline well before targets were removed, and that any further improvement in performance would have been difficult to achieve even if the target approach had been continued.

Visaria and Visaria, on the other hand, present cases from Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan on the field level realities of implementing a target free approach. They show that while the programme continues to be expressed in quantitative terms, workers are no longer being reprimanded for not meeting targets. This is an encouraging sign to enhance self-esteem of workers and is, therefore, likely to positively influence the quality of services. They comprehensively review activity specific expenditure to show that expenditure in services has increased over the past five years, although this increased expenditure cannot be attributed to the GOI commitment to ICPD goals. While appreciating external financial assistance that the government has been able to raise to support initial programme activities, they stress the need to raise domestic resources to ensure sustainability. Central to a sustainable programme is its ability to correctly and adequately monitor and evaluate its activities.

Murthy and, in another chapter, Pathak, Ram and Verma discuss the challenges of the new monitoring system and point out the need for greater sensitivity to state specific requirements while deciding upon monitoring indicators. Murthy, however, points out that the government's excessive preoccupation with an elaborate monitoring system has led to a neglect of other important aspects of the programme. Anjali Nayyar presents a comprehensive review of various advocacy efforts that have gone into the initial stages of programme implementation and points to the ills of the target approach. She argues that advocacy should continue to remain an integral part of the reproductive health programme given the environment of scepticism and apprehension.

Dileep Mavlankar proposes a comprehensive approach of human resource management to ensure continuing focus on quality or client needs, currently missing in the programme. He also emphasises the need to devise ways to ensure accountability, a concern which would increase once the private sector comes to play an important role in providing reproductive health services. Bhatia and Cleland, using health seeking behaviour data from a field study conducted in Karnataka, argue in favour of promoting a viable and efficient private sector, though they too simultaneously argue for evolving a system to monitor quality.

Given the extant emphasis on promoting family planning among married women of age group 15-49 years, the youth/adolescents have remained neglected. The school based population education or family life education programmes did little to address the reproductive health needs of this segment of the population. Sagari Singh points out that despite some major governmental and non-governmental efforts the youth continue to be ignored, are ill-informed and remain at best token partners in the reproductive health programme. Based on a review of some community based programmes, Masuma Mamdani argues that the most effective reproductive health programmes for youth and adolescents invariably include more than information or services and address larger issues. She also points to the need for a database to evaluate the effectiveness of community based programmes.

A critical strata that has remained out of the purview of family planning programme is men, despite ground realities of family institutions and gender relations. Saraswati Raju reviews some of the major NGO efforts in reaching out to men and presents different strategies that would be necessary for their greater involvement. She, however, argues for serious

government interventions to upscale and replicate NGO work rather than leave the responsibility of 'social change' entirely to the NGO sector.

In another important article Swapna Mukhopadhyaya and Jyotsana Sivaramayya argue that a vertical health programme which is unsure of its location within the local scenario, can neither empower women nor ensure sustainability. They point to the need for locating the reproductive health programme within the 'panchayat' structure.

The final section of the book includes seven articles of which three address the issues concerning HIV/AIDS. Other issues addressed include reproductive tract infection, abortion, safe motherhood, sexuality and sexual behaviour. Radhika Ramasubban critically examines several cultural and programmatic factors responsible for the absence of a clear policy on HIV/AIDS in India. She calls for clear commitments, a public discourse on sources of infection, and an integrated approach. Geeta Sethi on the other hand, presents a detailed description of government response to HIV/AIDS which centres around the activities of the National AIDS Control Organization (NACO). One, however, does not know whether these programmes have been effective. In the coming years, it is obvious that the NGO sector will play an important role in HIV/AIDS prevention efforts. Verma, Mane and Bhende review some of the strategies of the NGO sector in its response to HIV/AIDS, particularly in relation to women. They argue that gender disparity will have to be centrally addressed for these programmes to be effective.

The challenge of assessing the extent of RTI in a community-based intervention has been addressed by Masuma Mamdani. Similarly, abortion is another area which challenges effective community based intervention since it is difficult to assess the actual extent of the problem. Khan and his colleagues point to the gap between demand for abortion services and their actual provision. Dileep Mavlinkar reviews safe motherhood efforts in India and points out that they should receive much greater priority. The final chapter of the book discusses the status of research on sexuality and sexual behaviour in India. In an exhaustive and insightful review of major intervention research projects on sexual behaviour and other available literature, Pelto suggests a new research agenda in the area of sexual behaviour. He points to the need for developing culture specific conceptual frameworks of sexual behaviour, rather than studying sexual acts in isolation.

The volume could also have addressed other critical reproductive health areas such as infertility, qua-

lity of care and violence against women. Nevertheless, given the range of issues discussed and the database provided, this volume is an important resource material for researchers and policy and programme personnel alike. It should also serve as an important source of baseline information for a programme which needs much greater commitment and conviction than what is visible now.

**Ravi K. Verma**

## **MEDICAL EDUCATION AND HEALTH CARE:**

**A Pluridimensional Paradigm by J.S. Bajaj. IIAS, Shimla, 1998.**

AS the first, and so far only, representative of the medical profession on the Planning Commission, J.S. Bajaj's insights into the travails of our medical education system merit serious notice. Structured around his Radhakrishnan memorial lecture (1994), this set of essays touches on a variety of themes ranging from medical education to population policy, reproductive ecology, quality of life, environment and development and nutrition and poverty.

Bajaj points out that though both the Bhore Committee Report (1946) and the Radhakrishnan Committee Report (1949) stressed the utmost need to familiarise medical professionals with Indian systems of medicine as also ensure the necessary balance between doctors, nurses and paramedical staff and between general doctors and specialists – 50 years down the road we have not even begun to correct the distortions already evident at the time of Independence.

At that stage there were only 17 medical colleges in the country with an annual intake of 1400 students; today we have around 150 medical colleges producing 16000 medical graduates. Not only does the basic medical course completely bypass Indian systems of medicine, thereby strengthening the bias against indigenous practitioners, the system provides for nearly 10,000 post-graduate seats. The net implication of this runaway increase and distortion in our medical education is that we have an over-supply of over-qualified (though ill-trained) specialists who hover around urban complexes, mainly in private practice, while the rest of the medical system remains starved of necessary personnel.

Worse, despite the recommendations of numerous expert groups, no serious effort has been made to stop the proliferation of colleges and seats or focus attention and resources on the training of mid-level/

paramedical professionals. If anything, the profession has been able to manipulate the political system so as to retain its monopoly over medical treatment. What is surprising is that Bajaj, despite such gloomy analysis, remains an optimist.

The lessons from the other essays underscore the same message. The population programme, while incorporating all the welcome concepts of eschewing targets, strengthening women's empowerment through education, moving to a family (rather than woman) oriented approach and so on, continues in the rut of somehow meeting sterilisation targets. Similarly, notwithstanding the clear linkages between nutrition and health or more generally the non-medical factors influencing the health of the population – the profession's focus remains on strengthening the curative apparatus.

In this year of Health for All, it is imperative that our planners and politicians heed J.S. Bajaj's wise words and act on them. Otherwise, we will continue to suffer the consequences of distorted priorities.

**Seminarist**

**VOLUNTARY ACTION IN HEALTH AND POPULATION: The Dynamics of Social Transition** edited by Sunil Misra. Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1999.

THE book under review presents case studies of 14 action research projects supported by the Population Foundation of India. These projects were ending or had ended in 1995-96 and the case studies were written as qualitative evaluation of these projects – the purpose was to 'assess their quality of programme operations, their overall impact, the extent of people's participation, and the level of sustainability after the project funding was over.'

The case studies relate to: reducing infant mortality and fertility (3 case studies); integrated health, family planning and development (3 case studies); reproductive health and family planning in urban slums (4 case studies); reproductive health and family planning among industrial workers (3 case studies); and, family planning through rural medical practitioners (1 case study).

Given the main agenda of the council, the focus of all the action research projects was on fertility reduction. The case studies, though conducted by different people, are written in a standardised format and read uninspiringly.

All the projects studied were implemented through existing local NGOs and coordinated with the government health functionaries, used locally drawn community health volunteers, aimed to create awareness and in some cases provide services. Creation of IEC material, conducting entry level surveys, and in some cases starting *balwadis* or using peer communicators/trade unions for spreading the message of family planning or responsible sexual behaviour were the main activities. Though important steps, there was nothing new in most of these projects. Further, the inability of most projects to quantify their achievements or even measure their impact defeated the very purpose of having action research projects.

Nevertheless they do provide some important lessons: awareness generation must be backed with good service provision, people respond to programmes which address their felt needs like child care services, 3 or 5 years is a very short period for showing impact on fertility regulation or sexual behaviour and so on. Also that adopting a strategy just because it is currently fashionable without thinking of the long term implications may lead to complications. For example, in a number of projects the community health volunteers on whom the project was pegged refused to continue once their honorariums were withdrawn after project completion, making project gains unsustainable and leaving communities dissatisfied. This also raises the issue of responsibility of the NGOs and funding agencies to the community.

All the action research projects tackled the problem at the same level, i.e. the functioning of the existing system, and there too usually at the level of improving community use of the services provided by the existing system. A questioning of the system, its compartmentalised way of functioning, the narrow definitions and goals set by it and a dehumanising of the services was not studied by any of the projects. A look at some of these issues would have improved our understanding of the possible role of NGOs in the health and population sector.

An analysis of action research projects running with the help of different types of NGOs could have been rich and insightful. The varied challenges posed by different geographical and socio-cultural conditions and the different strategies adopted to meet these challenges depending on each NGOs respective strengths and weaknesses could have been discussed. The pros and cons of each of these strategies and the lessons to be learnt for all concerned – the project planners, the NGOs and funding agencies – could have been eluci-

dated. Are some kinds of projects more effective than others? Are some NGOs better suited than others? How can the gains be made sustainable? What could be the role of funding agencies in ensuring better results? These are some questions that could have been addressed. Instead, the editor only provides general conclusions such as there is need for careful selection of NGOs, more careful project planning, good quality baseline surveys and so on. There is no reference to the kind of baseline surveys possible, the factors to be considered while selecting NGOs, the possible processes of evaluation etc. That NGOs can play an important role along with the government in bringing about social change is well-known. What is less understood is the extent to which the NGOs can be used, the bureaucratic hurdles that hamper their work and how these can be overcome. In other words, it is the *how* of things that has been largely ignored.

Where the editor does take up the *how* – as in his suggested model for NGO-GOI collaboration – he has been both unimaginative and non-appreciative of the philosophy of voluntary (NGO) work. Asserting that the role of NGOs should be to create a ‘favourable climate’ for the government’s service provision mechanism (which in effect is a birth control provision mechanism) doesn’t stand in good stead. Admittedly, a number of NGOs today are doing just this kind of work, but that is lamentable, not ideal. The primary responsibility of an NGO is towards the community it serves. If the interests of the community match with the interests and employed methods of the government, what he suggests may work. But, given the present situation in our country, one has to reiterate that NGOs are not expected to be a mere extension of the government system that disregards people’s felt and expressed needs, and imposes on them larger state goals of population control – no matter how well camouflaged in the latest jargon.

His understanding of what needs to be done as a part of the health system is more useful. He rightly suggests that it is possible to replicate some of the work done by the NGOs in the larger system and that duplication of efforts between NGOs themselves can be avoided. This however is an uphill task.

Overall, what emerges is a lack of conceptual clarity. What does the editor want to say? Did he wish to speak about the various strategies adopted to tackle the ‘population problem’? In which case the studies could be clubbed as those targeting the ‘problem’ in isolation, clubbing it with the problem of infant mortality, or within a wider mesh of reproductive health

or an even wider model of integrated health. There could have been some discussion of the relative success and problems of each approach. He could have concentrated on the difference in approaches used and experiences with different population groups, for example, rural as compared to urban or unorganised workers as compared to organised workers. He does touch on some of the issues, though peripherally: Like the point that integrated health projects are difficult to implement as they require coordination with more government departments or that it is easier to work with organised sector workers as employers assist in the effort.

In short, the editor misses out on the opportunity to highlight systemic and methodological issues relevant for project planners, implementers, funders and others working on issues of public health.

Sapna Agarwal

## **ABORTION IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD**

edited by Axel I. Mundigo and Cynthia Indriso.  
WHO and Vistaar Publications, Delhi, 1999.

THE 1994 Cairo Conference on Population and Development and the 1995 Beijing World Conference for Women gave a green signal to reinstate work on minimising the consequences of unsafe abortion, and on strengthening services where abortion is legal. The WHO initiated the research contained in this book long before that time. Interestingly, the authors note that when the research initiative came up for approval, it received the full support of the organisation’s donors and the World Health Assembly. It is indeed commendable that there was unanimity in acknowledging the importance of the subject, and that this research was taken up at a time when public debate was so highly charged. The 22 studies contained in the book provide information from 16 countries, mostly in Latin America and Asia. Creditably, the attempt has been to concentrate on countries where abortion is either illegal or highly restricted.

The highlight of the book is a section on abortion among adolescents. The studies provide information on a population strata whose importance is only now being acknowledged, and whose needs are not clearly understood by programme managers. The study from Tanzania had not, in fact, started out to focus on adolescents, but stumbled upon the fact that an enormous number of the abortions were among young girls. With the increasing risk of contracting AIDS from sex work-

ers, older men are seeking out young girls, and they, taking up with sugar daddies, are finding themselves having to deal with more gifts than they bargained for. A study from China shows how the increasing age at marriage has resulted in premarital cohabitation. This, combined with a lack of body knowledge and contraceptive information – even in China – has resulted in increased abortions among young girls.

In Korea, migration and urbanisation among young women, an increasing age at marriage and a growing sense of independence, has increased premarital sexual activity. Surprisingly, the study shows that not only is knowledge of contraception limited but that most single women would hesitate to use it because it would be contrary to their self-image as moral beings. This no doubt offers a lesson for programme planners, since most end up designing contraceptive services without regard to this important insight into the psyche of young women.

The study of adolescents from Mexico is among the most powerful in the book. It attempts to unravel the language used to talk about the body, sex and pregnancy, important when working with the youth and designing information or counselling programmes for them. The study shows what and who influences the decision to abort – what role is played by a supportive or otherwise boyfriend in the decision making process. It is usually the mother, with another female figure, who helps clinch the decision and find an abortionist – the boyfriend usually plays no role in the latter process. In Mexico he does not even pay for it, though in Tanzania he might, probably as a result of being older and better off. Lack of money is a recurrent theme in the stories told by women – whether it is to bring up the child they have conceived, or to pay for a safe abortion, or even an unsafe one.

The studies show how, for providers of health services, there is often a conflict between personal values and client needs. Many don't approve of abortion, but will do it themselves, or refer clients if they come face to face with a woman who is confronted by a cruel reality and has few choices. They are pragmatic enough to acknowledge that if an abortion is inevitable, it is better that it be safe, because it is women rather than the health systems who have to deal with the consequences of botched abortions. Fortunately, it does not seem to be necessary to resolve an ethical debate to prevent disability and death. The book offers perspectives of doctors, traditional birth attendants, herb vendors and even pharmacists who give women drugs to abort. Of course, for many service providers the prime con-

sideration is not compassion but cash, especially where abortion is illegal.

It should come as no surprise that the studies demonstrate that women don't like to rely on abortion to contracept, and that even when abortion is easily available they use it with hesitation and ambivalence. Abortion becomes necessary when contraception fails or when it is not available or accessible. The *mantra*, clearly, is that one should provide quality family planning services. In many different ways, throughout the book, women say 'contraception is troublesome'. Women want information, they want to be treated with respect at health centres, they are afraid of side effects, and shun inconvenience. What may be, due to its lower effectiveness, an unacceptable family planning method for service providers, will often be highly acceptable to women because of its convenience – withdrawal being one example.

Sadly, 'Had I known,' is a phrase often heard from young women who didn't know what they were letting themselves in for. This thought runs as a common thread throughout the book. Had they known the horrors of abortion or had they known about contraception properly, they would have acted differently. The studies illustrate the importance of providing sex education to young people, both boys and girls, in a responsible and sensitive way. This, at least, is now being more seriously attempted by programmes, though more in response to concerns about AIDS than abortion.

The book examines the quality of abortion services, and indeed the availability of family planning services and information post-abortion. Regretfully, it appears that the notion of abortion not being used as a method of family planning may, for some time to come, remain mere rhetoric at the policy level, as efforts at post-abortion counselling are still weak in most programmes.

The book contains many important lessons for policy-makers and programme managers. However, it tends to paint a somewhat patchy picture. It might have been more effective had it set out not just to publish the research carried out as part of this particular initiative, but to provide a more comprehensive picture in different regions and conditions under which abortion is provided. Though the book looks at the abortion-contraception relationship, service quality issues, women's perspectives and provider perspectives, one doesn't see the totality in any one country or region, and the reader is left with a feeling of incompleteness. It would also have been good to see some comparative analysis, for example, of the abortion-

contraception relationship in situations of legal and illegal abortion.

It is disappointing that there is not a single study from India, a country where an estimated 6.7 million abortions take place each year. The absence couldn't have been because of the focus on countries with restrictive abortion policies, since one finds that the maximum number of studies are from China. One hopes that India is not absent because of a lack of good research proposals! Fortunately, a major national study on abortion is now being formulated which should provide a comprehensive understanding of the situation in this country.

One also misses an analysis of the connections between abortion and STD or HIV. There is little on the relationships between sexual violence and abortion. And one would have liked to understand better the perception of men. The editors acknowledge these gaps, and had these studies been conducted after the mid-90s, undoubtedly these issues would have received more attention.

Some of the studies do touch upon the gender dimension, though one would have liked to see it handled more centrally. The Mexico studies clearly demonstrate how women use pregnancy to control a relationship and shore-up their self-esteem. Power dynamics are visible in who influences the decision to abort, who pays for it, and who has to find the abortionist. Whose pleasure, whose pain? Women have a simple definition of service quality for abortion: a procedure that is done quickly and painlessly. It is interesting to note the emphasis given to pain in the client definitions of quality. In fact, for many women the absence or presence of pain strongly influences the decision to abort.

The book contains a chapter on the methodologies used in these studies. This may offer useful lessons for those planning research on abortion. Especially useful would be the experience of those who have conducted research in a context where abortion is illegal. Most notably, the book discusses how the research has already influenced policy. Examples have been provided of how research has informed, or indeed generated, public debate in some countries. There are also examples of how service institutions have taken steps to improve quality of care on the basis of research findings. Now that's research for action!

Ena Singh

\* The views expressed are personal and not those of the organization where the author works.

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## SEMINAR ISSUES

**Reproductive Health** (447) November 1996; **AIDS** (396) August 1992; **Health for All** (369) May 1990; **The Fight for Health** (12) August 1960.

### Positions Available at CEHAT

CEHAT, the research centre of Anusandhan Trust, stands for research, action, service and advocacy in health and allied themes. Socially relevant and rigorous academic health research and action at CEHAT is for the well being of the disadvantaged masses, for strengthening people's health movements and for realising right to health care. Its institutional structure acts as an interface between progressive people's movements and academia.

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CEHAT is presently looking for researchers, counsellors and trainers at junior as well as senior levels. The current themes are:

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Senior researchers should have 5-10 years of experience and must be able to manage projects independently, write analytic reports, papers of publishable quality and assist in organisational development of CEHAT. The salary frame would be Rs 10-15 thousand per month plus social security benefits.

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All applicants must be postgraduates in social sciences, life sciences, medicine and nursing, social work, humanities, health management etc. and must be computer literate. A few positions are specifically for women researchers, counsellors (women only) and doctors at both junior and senior levels. Fresh postgraduates may also apply for positions of research assistants.

Those interested please send in your CV along with a two page note on your interest for the position you are applying for by post or email to *The Coordinator, CEHAT, 2nd Floor, BMC Maternity Home, near Lok Darshan, Military Road, Marol, Andheri East, Mumbai 400059* within 30 days. Email: [cehat@vsnl.com](mailto:cehat@vsnl.com) Personal solicitation is discouraged. Only shortlisted candidates will be called for interviews.

### CSDS invites young scholars for its Summer Workshop on Democracy

#### What's it all about?

The Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi invites applications from young scholars to participate in a two week Summer Workshop on Democracy to be held from 3 to 16 July 2000 in Delhi. The workshop is sponsored by the Indian Council of Social Science Research with an additional grant from the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

The workshop is meant to train a new generation of theoretically sensitive and empirically grounded analysts of democratic politics. The training will cover a broad range of issues in political theory, comparative history, institutional design and methodology of empirical research—all from the vantage point of understanding democratic experience in contemporary India and the third world. The workshop seeks to challenge the received ways of thinking about democracy and politics.

#### What do I get from it?

- Introduction to recent literature on democracy
- Training in techniques of empirical political research
- Interaction with leading scholars and intellectuals

Your lodging and boarding during the workshop and the expenses on your travel to and from Delhi will be paid by the organisers. There is no participation fee of any kind.

#### Who is eligible?

For us a 'young scholar' is not only a Ph. D. student. You could be a student, a teacher or a professional (journalist, writer, etc.). We would prefer that you:

- Have completed M. A., preferably in Political Science (applicants from other disciplines and without a master's degree can also be considered)
- Have started or intend to pursue research on democracy in the broadest sense (preference to those registered for Ph. D. or with an M. Phil degree)

But it is essential that you:

- Have a fascination for analysing politics
- Can cheerfully go through two weeks of intense work
- Can read and understand English

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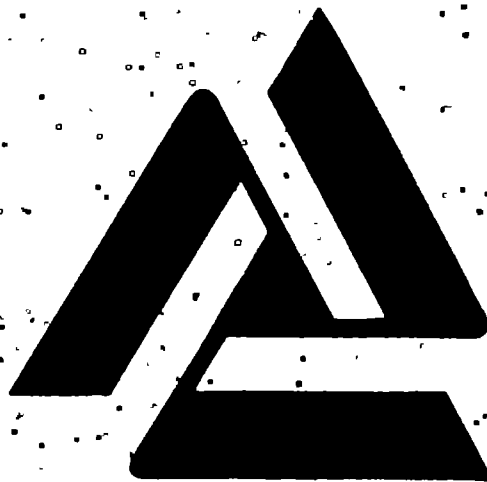
A committee at the CSDS will select about 30 participants from among the applications received on the basis of academic record, letter of recommendation and a statement of purpose. Weightage will be given to the following categories: women, religious minorities, OBC, SC, ST and those who have studied in rural schools.

#### How to apply?

Write to or contact Mr. Sanjay Kumar, CSDS, 29 Rajpur Road, Delhi 110054 to request for an application form. **Completed applications must reach us by 27 May 2000**

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# Comment

## Jammu Journey

A two-day roundtable on the theme 'Jammu and Kashmir: Urgency for a Dialogue' was organised in mid-March in Jammu by the Kashmir Foundation for Peace and Development Studies. The participants, some 50-60 persons (mostly male) came from the Valley, Jammu, Ladakh (only one) and Delhi. Among them were Firdous Syed Baba, Raouf Rasool, Zafar Mehraj, ministers Handoo and Mohd. Shafi, Saifuddin Soz, Ved Bhasin, Balraj Puri, Rekha Chowdhury, Tsering Darji, P.N. Dhar, George Verghese, Admiral K.K. Nayyar, M.K. Rasgotra, R.K. Mishra, Amitabh Mattoo, Bhagwan Josh, Kamal Mitra Chenoy and Shanti Vir Kaul. The chief minister made a brief but focused intervention. Not a single politician invited from Delhi could make the time to attend.

The meeting sought to address a sorely felt need to start a people-to-people dialogue within the state and with concerned citizens from Delhi ('the rest of India'). Since the political leadership at all levels has lost credibility and violence has shattered life in the Valley, can we begin a process from within civil society to voice our respective concerns, to build trust and to seek an understanding of the complex and fraught situation in Jammu and Kashmir?

As Raouf Rasool put it in his welcome address: 'Here, on this platform, we all have to make a simple judgement: do we want the situation to remain as it is or do we want it to change? If we want to save whatever is left of us then let us pledge to give each other a helping hand, a keen ear, a kind eye and, above all, a feeling and passionate heart.'

This cry from the heart set the tone. Speaker after speaker stressed the need to talk, to open up to one another. It was a cry for sincerity and good faith. Only this could begin to heal the wounds inflicted over 10 long years by violence, mistrust and hatred. Equally poignant was the cry against the awful dehumanisation of victimhood: ordinary Kashmiris feel humiliated and stripped of all dignity by the lumping of all Valley Muslims as suspect and subject to harassment and violence by the security forces at any time of the night or day, with no recourse to redress.

There was strong criticism against the state government which has abandoned the responsibility of administration, left everything to the security forces

and is paralysed and inert in every sphere of governance. Some voiced their apprehension about a communally driven agenda at the Centre and the divisive role being played by the recently formed village defence committees.

No one from the Valley talked of secession, or even of *azadi*, and many spoke of the need to revive the elementary seeds of civil society – the little, everyday freedoms to act on local issues, to protest malgovernance, even to celebrate small joys. These are regarded with suspicion by the security forces and suppressed as signs of rebellion, but for the common people they are the indispensable signs of normality, of living with dignity, of simply being human.

Speakers from Jammu underlined the need to open up channels of communication, especially between the three regions of the state. They highlighted the complexity of the situation, the differentiations between and within the three regions, the need for handling these issues with sensitivity and care so as to avoid communal solutions, above all on the matter of autonomy. The tendency of the political leaders to talk in terms of communal identities rather than about Kashmir, Jammu and Ladakh was a disturbing sign. The lone Ladakhi spoke feelingly of the way Kashmir has dominated Ladakh from the beginning, denied Ladakh its role in state affairs, and discriminated against Buddhists in all avenues of public employment. Ladakh, he said, had never wanted to be anywhere but in India and today it has no option but to seek Union Territory status. Let Jammu get statehood and give Kashmir its autonomy, was his plea. This, interestingly, led to cries of 'No! no trifurcation' from the Kashmiris.

The speakers from Delhi spoke with less emotion but equal sincerity about the need to face hard truths: India was not going to give up Kashmir but within this parameter everything was possible. We must learn from the past but not become its prisoners. We must look forward and think concretely about what we mean by *azadi* or autonomy. Kashmiris must address the question of what kind of Kashmir they want: will it be a democratic and plural Kashmir or a communal one? What kind of society, what kind of Islam do Kashmiri Muslims want? There is no doubt that Partition left a certain ambiguity in Kashmir but this can

only be resolved in Kashmir itself, when the above questions are addressed and not in India or in Pakistan. For what, after all, does *azadi* really mean? Is it not a condition wherein all can live in peace with freedom and dignity and security of life and limb? Kashmiri Muslims must decide: self-determination or *azadi* for whom? If they don't want trifurcation of the state, they must face up to this question.

It was pointed out that the question of human rights and the struggle for freedom can be compatible only if the struggle is non-violent. We should learn from Gandhi. To take to arms against the modern state is folly and doomed to failure. You are only playing into the hands of the state which will crush you. Moreover, those from whom you seek help will turn your struggle to their own purpose which may not be yours. Also, as Gandhiji said, 'We must perforce remain non-violent if we are to represent all communities.' A violent struggle by a divided movement is a recipe for disaster.

It was left to one of the few women speakers to point out that there was no representation of women from the Valley. This must be redressed at the next meeting since women were among the worst sufferers in Kashmir. She also outlined some concrete steps of help. We could start by supporting some of the thousands of children orphaned or otherwise crippled by the violence, with their educational needs as well as genuinely engaging with these children on a person-to-person basis. This could be one way of demonstrating that the rest of India cares.

Such was the tenor of this dialogue. It was amazing to hear that this was the first time that such a meeting had taken place. Let alone talking like this with people from outside the state, even the people from within the different regions had never got together before. Everyone stressed the need for such dialogue to continue – in Srinagar next, then in Leh. It must be sustained and broadened and deepened. This was the first time people had come together and spoken from the heart. As Rekha Chowdhury from Jammu put it: 'People say things in bits and parts. No one has the whole truth. It must be put together by all of us. Each region has its own grievances, its own problems. So far we have talked back-to-back. We need to dialogue amongst ourselves – we need to talk and talk and talk. Then we may come to some understanding even of what our problems really are.'

So far so good. But what was not said was as significant as what was. Even today, Kashmiris seem to have a blind spot about the role of violence and its

agents in the Valley. They see only the violence of the state and seem to be unable to connect this with the violence of the militants and the terrorists from across the Line of Control. They seem unable to appreciate that the scale of state violence is bound to be affected by the scale and intensity of terrorism – indeed of the proxy war which Pakistan is conducting in Kashmir. They seem unaware that Kashmiriyat is threatened as much by the brutality of the terrorists as by the violent repression of the state. As also indeed by the kind of Islam that the Talibanised *jehadis* espouse. Is this because the borderline between the Islam of Kashmiriyat and the Islam of the Jamaat-i-Islami is, in fact, rather thin? One must hope not.

And if the horrendous massacre of the Sikhs of Chattisinghpura, followed by the equally horrendous blundering of the security forces, dramatizes anything surely it is that this kind of action is bound to cause an out of all proportion response from a force that is strained to the limits; a force that is confused and tired of fighting this endless war against an enemy which hides among a largely hostile people, while the political masters of the state and the country fiddle and play their partisan games for pelf and power, oblivious of the fate of the country and its people. Are soldiers not human? Do soldiers have no human rights?

In such a situation, what is needed is vision and courage and integrity from the central and state governments as well as the entire political opposition. But all we have is a weak and divided political establishment which has no vision worth the name and can reach no consensus on any vital issue because it is only concerned with petty partisan politics. So it is up to civil society, to democratic Indians everywhere, to take up this challenge and to build bridges with the people of Kashmir. We cannot do this by inciting further alienation, violence and repression. But we can perhaps reach out and share our honest concerns with them. We can stand by them against the violations of their dignity and rights as citizens of a democratic country. We can help to ensure that if elections are held – even panchayat elections – these will be free and fair. But we also need to encourage Kashmiris to participate in the political process and the revival of democracy in the state. The various parties and groups must come out and take part in elections everywhere. Only then can they demonstrate their support and only then can their claims and demands be taken seriously. There is a long way to go, but hopefully the journey has begun, in Jammu.

Primila Lewis



# Communications

*An open letter on Population Policy from HealthWatch to N. Shanmugham, Honourable Minister, Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, New Delhi.*

Dear Shri Shanmugham, We, the members of the HealthWatch Steering Committee, wish to share with you our responses to the summary version of the National Population Policy (NPP) 2000. The policy statement has been keenly awaited in part because of a concern that it might contain electoral or other disincentives. Such disincentives, we feared, would once again open up a Pandora's box of ethically questionable practices that the Government of India (in a remarkable consensus with other members of the United Nations) firmly repudiated in 1994 at the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo. A reading of the short summary of NPP 2000 indicates there is little to fear in this regard. The opening sentence of the summary clearly and unambiguously states 'that the most effective development policies are those which are socially just and focus on the well-being of all people.'

This approach continues in the next paragraph which achieves a balance between the government's

stated goal of stabilising population growth and the need to make reproductive health care accessible and affordable to all, increase access to education, extend basic amenities such as safe water and sanitation, and empower women and increase their employment opportunities. Furthermore, *the immediate objective* of the NPP is clearly stated to be addressing existing and unmet needs for contraception, health infrastructure and personnel, and integrating the service delivery for basic reproductive and child health care. Insofar as 'unmet need' is meant to focus on providing good quality, safe and effective family planning services *to meet people's own child-bearing aspirations*, we feel this approach is laudable. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare deserves to be congratulated for foregrounding an ethical approach at the very front of the document, and for side-stepping the pressures to bring in electoral or other disincentives which would only serve to distance ordinary people from the policy. We hope also that the NPP will be linked to a comprehensive health policy in an effective manner.

There is need, however, for a stronger emphasis than at present in the NPP's 'strategic themes' (for which operational strategies will be developed) on the following central issues: *promotion of gender*

*equality and equity* in programmes and through sensitisation of communities (especially men and boys); strengthening the *quality* of family planning and health services on a priority basis; ensuring serious implementation of a participatory approach based on *community needs assessment*; and *training* and motivating service personnel and their supervisors at all levels towards ensuring gender equity and service quality improvements

We are also concerned about the following:

- \* That while the NPP's focus on a more inter-sectoral approach is valuable, a much stronger institutional mechanism is needed to ensure this; rather than a 'coordination cell' being located within the Planning Commission, it needs to be located in the Cabinet itself. It must have a clear and time-bound mandate to evolve workable procedures and operational guidelines, and to ensure that such coordination actually occurs; without this we are afraid coordination between key sectors will remain an unfulfilled dream.
- \* That collaboration between NGOs and government take the form of genuine and mutually respectful partnerships that can develop innovative combinations of the creativity of NGOs, commitment and accountability of service providers, with the scope and reach of government services.
- \* That increasing institutional deliveries rapidly is neither feasible nor desirable unless their quality and access can be dramatically improved; feedback from the ground-level strongly suggests that re-focusing on strengthening the capacity of traditional birth attendants and Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs) to provide safe services will be much more in line with ground realities and also with women's preferences.
- \* That emphasising the 'diversity of health care providers', while useful in principle, should not lead to an uncontrolled legitimisation of the large numbers of questionable health providers especially in the rural areas; the focus should rather be on providing workable incentives for trained health providers as has been done in some of the states.
- \* That contraceptive technology and research give strong priority to women-controlled and safe methods.

So far as *institutional structures* are concerned, we believe it is essential that national and state-level commissions and especially the Technology Mission within the Department of Family Welfare include those from within and outside government who are clearly committed to and knowledgeable

about women's health needs and women's empowerment.

Finally, we strongly feel that in order for the NPP to genuinely become a people's and particularly women's policy, it needs to move in a direction where people appreciate and respond to its goals and methods without a need for either disincentives or incentives. While many of the specific 'promotional and motivational measures' are unobjectionable, we are seriously concerned about the following:

- \* That rewarding panchayats and zilla parishads for exemplary performance should not translate into ground-level coercion of (especially) poor women towards unwanted and unsafe sterilisations or IUD insertions. It is essential to have clear guidelines on how these rewards should work, and an inclusion of criteria that are focused on improving the health care access and health status of poor women and girls, as well as women's empowerment.
- \* That the ethics of rewarding those 'below the poverty line', whether through health insurance or any other way provided they accept sterilisation, is highly questionable and runs counter to much of the spirit of NPP 2000. Poor people and especially poor women and girls need access to safe and good quality health services on a priority basis. Placing conditionalities on this not only opens a dangerous door to potentially coercive practices at the ground-level, but reinforces a mind set among providers and politicians that poor people deserve nothing better. We strongly believe that these measures should be dropped from the policy.

Considering the national importance of the policy, we are sharing this letter with a wider audience.

Sincerely,

*Health Watch Trust—Steering Committee*

Indu Capoor, Centre for Health Education, Training and Nutrition Awareness, Ahmedabad;  
Mirai Chatterji, Self Employed Women's Association, Ahmedabad; Jashodhara Dasgupta, Sahayog, Almora; K. Pappu, Child-in-Need Institute, Calcutta; M. Prakasamma, Academy of Nursing Studies, Hyderabad; Martha Pushparani, Initiatives: Women and Development, Chennai; Nina Puri, Family Planning Association of India, New Delhi; Radhika Ramasubban, SOCTEC, Mumbai; Vimala Ramachandran, Educational Resource Unit, Jaipur; Gita Sen, Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore; H. Sudarshan, Vivekananda Girijana

Kalyana Kendra, Mysore; Ravi Verma, International  
Institute of Population Studies, Mumbai;  
Neela Visaria, Coordinator, Health Watch.  
310 Vivekanand Marg,  
Jaipur 302001  
\*6 February 2000

## Remembering Dr Mabelle Arole (1935-1999)

THE name of Mabelle Arole conjures up contrasting images – a physically frail lady with an iron determination. She was truly a people's person, one who believed and demonstrated that health for all could indeed become a reality if only the professionals allowed it to be so. She saw the spirit of a wick lamp which could transfer its light to another lamp, in ordinary, humble and illiterate village women; and she set out to educate, empower and build this belief into a reservoir of sustainable community based primary health care programme in one of the poorest parts of India between 1970 to 1999 with enormous trust and confidence.

I had the privilege of meeting her in August 1998 when we visited CRHP, Jamkhed, as part of a delegation of officials from Rajasthan involved in the Reproductive and Child Health programme. For five days we experienced an enormous vision turning into reality which has transformed the lives of 250,000 poor and marginalized people in and around Jamkhed. Although still poor and with meager resources, these people have created for themselves caring and sharing communities ensuring an improved quality of life. Infant mortality, a reliable health indicator, has been reduced from 176 to 19 per 1000 births; birth rates have fallen from 40 to 20 per 1000 population. The guidance and inspiration for this pioneering work by CRHP was provided by Mabelle Arole.

When we visited Jamkhed, she was on leave from her assignment as advisor to the Unicef South Asia office in Nepal, still recuperating from her massive illness. Despite her fragile health, she accompanied us to the project areas, and with great patience helped us understand the concept and processes required in people's empowerment through participation in their own health matters. The needs assessment, constant review and monitoring is done by the villagers themselves, especially women.

Mabelle Arole was born in a family of Methodist Christians on 26 December 1935 as Mabelle Kamala Rajappan, in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh. It was her father, Rajappan D. Imanual, a professor of New Testament Greek at the Theological Seminary, who introduced her to Rajnikant Arole, a fellow student at CMC, Vellore. In him she found a willing partner to share her aspirations and hopes. They married in 1960 shortly after completing their internship, and thus began their journey on an uncharted humanitarian path. While attempting to sensitise health promoters and the community to radical and pertinent issues in health and culture, they empowered and gave recognition to women and deprived groups. As a result of their efforts, scores of women have come forward and acquired knowledge and skills, not only in health matters but organizational aspects too. Today, they are participating in national and international forums as trainers and role models, as competent educationists, communicators and social workers. Mabelle Arole, together with her husband Rajnikant, demonstrated that health can be an entry point into socio-economic development. They worked closely with government health programmes in the area, particularly in family planning, immunization, leprosy, and tuberculosis identification and care. CRHP has trained hundreds of government PHC doctors, nurses and matrons, as well as medical and paramedical students.

Mabelle Arole's passing away is a terrible personal loss not only to her husband and children, Shobha and Ravi, but to the medical fraternity, paramedics and above all to thousands of those who formed her team. Together they went beyond simply improving health conditions for the most deprived and poor. Her gentle and timely stimulation facilitating social change has turned social inequalities upside down. Her school of public health in Jamkhed imparts training about field realities discovered with communities, which is the ultimate truth.

At a time when authentic role models are desperately needed, Mabelle Arole will be greatly missed. In spite of the enormous achievements and honours such as the Padma Bhushan in 1991 and Ramon Magsaysay Award in 1979, she never lost her humility. The best homage that we can pay her is to keep the wick lamp alight, so that her glory never fades away.

**Aparna Sahay**  
Jaipur

# Backpage

BARELY had the hullabaloo over Bill Clinton's visit to the country died down, when Salman Rushdie hit town. The occasion – the Commonwealth Award ceremony to select the best book for 1999. Though Rushdie got pipped to the award by the reclusive J.M. Coetzee, two-time winner of the prestigious Booker, media attention remained unwaveringly focused on the Indian born writer, helped no doubt by the fact that Coetzee refused to make an appearance.

This was a very different Rushdie. When he first hit the limelight with what critics believe remains his best work, *Midnight's Children*, Salman Rushdie came across as somewhat supercilious and cold. Two decades and many more books later, with his life turned upside down by the Iranian *fatwa* occasioned by the *Satanic Verses*, the scars of his traumatic experience sit lightly on him. Despite heavy security and mystery governing his movements, his public appearances came across as masterpieces of public relations.

For a country which scored a dubious first in banning *Satanic Verses* and long denied him a visa, both the government and the media treated Rushdie with unfailing courtesy. The ban on *Satanic Verses* still remains in force, and fringe political formations continue to highlight his alleged blasphemy against the Prophet and his family. Granting him a visa and providing him security, despite the ritual protests, thus shows both courage and maturity. And this when Rushdie is no admirer of the currently in fashion ideology of Hindutva.

As the reigning pop idol of Indo-Anglican fiction, and as someone who has helped create a mega-buck market for Indian writing in English, Rushdie's views on the creativity of our English writing remain mired in controversy. Few have forgotten his somewhat derisive comments on the quality of our non-English fiction. The defence that his judgement was based on the quality of translations available to him hardly convince.

For one, he seems less aware of the power dimension governing the relationship between the different Indian languages. True that English is no longer only a colonial legacy, and that all over the country people have both adopted and transformed it to suit their creative purposes, it nevertheless remains the expression of the hegemonic elite. As such, while the Indian and South Asian contribution to the vibrancy and multivocality of the language is undeniable, it has simultaneously led to a marginalisation, at least in terms of market recognition, of non-English writing.

But more than language politics, most Indian writing in English seems marked by a narrowness of vision and experience. Despite its phenomenal growth in the last five decades, creatively speaking English remains the preferred mode of expression of the upwardly mobile middle class Indian. More than the events and processes governing the life chances of the vast majority of our co-citizens, it is middle class interiority and angst and global (read western) literary trends that mark this literature.

It can be and is no one's case that the world of the middle class Indian lacks legitimacy. Both in numbers and as consumers this strata has come to stay. It is, however, worth considering just how insular this world has become. The opening up to global influences has simultaneously contributed to a weakening of the links with the local. It should come as no surprise that honourable exceptions aside, the dominant strain of our English writing remains apolitical if not non-political, with little to say about India's vast underclass. We have nothing comparable to a Rahi Masoom Raza's *Adha Gaon*, Renu's *Maila Anchal*, Srila Shukla's *Raag Darbari* or Bhairappa's *Godhuli* – and one is here referring only to books which have been translated into English.

In this era of hegemonic globalisation, with symbols of American culture ruling the roost, this losing out on our roots and concerns should be a matter of worry. Instead of turning xenophobic and aggressively swadeshi with an uncritical pride in all that can be marketed as genuinely Indian, we need to create the spaces and the structures where significant, though non-dominant, voices too get a fair hearing. Just as multicultural and polyglot New York, Rushdie's favoured imaginary homeland, does not quite represent the American experience, Indo-Anglican fiction, at best, signifies a minor part of our cultural churning.

Now that Rushdie has managed to re-establish physical contact with the land of his birth and childhood, he could do worse than turn his undeniable skills and presence towards exploring the ramifications of this cultural encounter. If some of the excitement that we display towards the NRI authors could be directed at the native marginalised, our experiment with creating a genuinely multicultural society could emerge stronger.

Harsh Sethi



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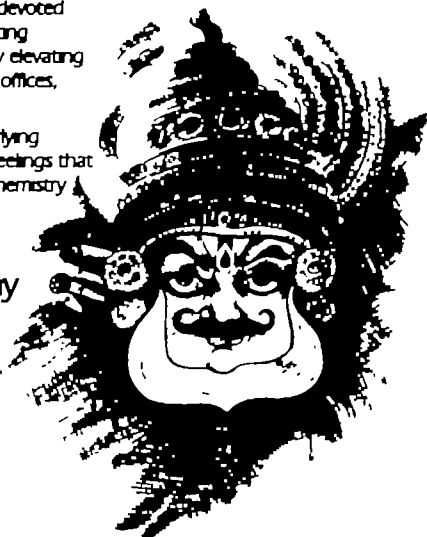
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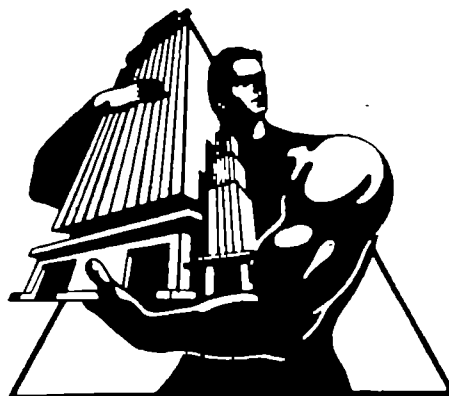
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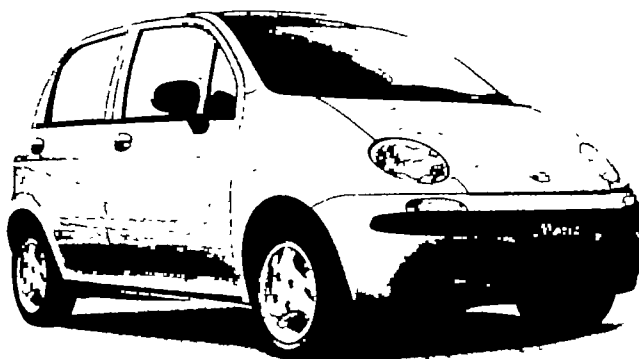
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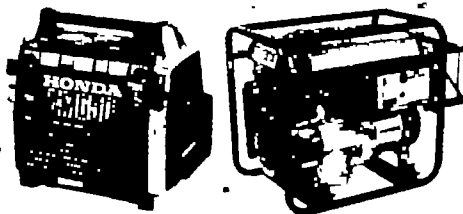
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# seminar

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A journal which seeks to reflect through free discussion, every shade of Indian thought and aspiration. Each month, a single problem is debated by writers belonging to different persuasions. Opinions expressed have ranged from Janata to Congress, from sarvodaya to communist to independent. And the non-political specialist too has voiced his views. In this way it has been possible to answer a real need of to gather the facts and ideas of this age and to help people arrive at a certain degree of cohesion and in facing the problems of economics, of politics, of

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engagement with democracy

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# The problem

WRITING about Africa creates an array of stumbling blocks. I am neither an Africanist nor can I claim to have engaged with African issues in a systematic way until recently. Africa is almost next door, proximate to our subcontinent, yet millions of miles away in terms of the imagination. One is almost certain that it is the reciprocal truth. For the Africans too India remains a distant entity. For both of us it is Europe or America that is proximate in terms of our dreams and fantasies. The place of exile, diaspora, studentship, models of behaviour is still the West. For each the other is noise, silence. Yet, as one communication theorist put it, noise is unwelcome music, music we have to respond to and learn to appreciate. For an Indian this is doubly essential. Africa is part of us. It was a part of our cosmopolitan identity.

Indians have engaged with Africa for centuries as traders, migrants, coolies, professionals. The cosmopolitanism of earlier times was such that we were a part of Africa and Africa was a part of us. This everydayness has somehow been lost. The novelist Amitav Ghosh makes this point in his *In an Antique Land*, a story about the Indian Ocean trade. He shows that up to the 15th century Indian ports were a cosmopolitan mix of different overseas groups. These groups interacted and understood each other tacitly.

Our societies today, in this global period seem to have lost their cosmopolitanism. The Indian identity has in addition suffered an information loss, an impoverishment of a self where Africa was an integral part. Gandhi's politics was a part of this cosmopolitanism. The Indian support for Mandela might have been the last vestige of this legacy. Today, Africa has become stereotyped in the Indian psyche. We believe with the West that it is a 'lost continent' which houses the lost development decade. To most minds Africa is the site for eco-safaris, the land of exotic animals, parks like Kruger, the former home of apartheid, the land where AIDS was born.

In recent times there have been attempts by South Asian intellectuals to break this stereotyping. A recent issue of *Identity, Culture and Politics* floats the idea of an Afro-Asian dialogue. But even the most sensitive of South Asian writers have yet to break out of the unconscious stereotyping, the facticity of the old images which nibbles at their text. It echoes the words of the missionary writer, imperialists like Cecil Rhodes, or old British texts on governance just when it seeks to go past them. What we need to do is to go beyond the tentative attempts and let Africa speak and invent itself in all its plurality. We need to go beyond the image of Africa as a 'lesser sibling', 'a true other', 'a problem continent'. Africa needs to be seen also as a problem solver, not just as home of 'origins' but original solutions. This issue of *Seminar* is an attempt to explore such reflections.

The question of an Afro-Asian dialogue becomes even more relevant given the current celebrations about the return to democracy across the world. Africa is part of the celebration but its history of transition, its struggles, its story is different from that of Eastern Europe or South Asia or Latin America. Most celebrations of democracy work at the rudimentary level and fail to capture the fact that transition to democracy is not yet complete; the dictators might return in democratic masks. Issues about brutalisation, the collapse of the state, the ecological degradation need to be faced. But most crucially, the notion of democracy needs to be pluralised.

Deliberations on democracy today lack depth and there is danger that they may just become managerial extensions of the liberal agendas of the IMF and the World Bank. Such attempts reduce democracy to electoralism, as a sibling of the market. This is not to deny the vital need for electoral politics or the dynamism that the market might bring to inert state bureaucracies. However, societies that have been torn asunder by violence, corruption, nepotism,

the hijacking of the state, by ecological devastations, inequities, and low intensity warfare need a more enriching notion of democracy and institution building. Notions that will build in structures of legitimacy. Both South Asian and African societies today need a more empowering definition of democracy which will give voice to the more marginalised and economically dislocated in their societies. There is also a need to question how much of the violence was due to the developmental models and how much due to the culture of politics.

The dialogue of democracy needs to be more than contingent on Africans and South Asians meeting in an American university and discovering common resonances half-way through the last days breakfast which one then tries desperately to sustain over emails. The African celebration of ideas, the laughter, the openness to evil and yet the sense of the comic about dictatorship is something that we need to learn. The Truth Commission is only one of the experiments being conducted across Africa to facilitate the reinvention of democracy. The works of Wole Soyinka, Andre Brink, Ali Mazrui, Njabulo Ndebele are but the iceberg of ideas that African intellectuals are working on – ranging from biculturalism and political economy, to the new idea of an 'organic intellectual'. To capture this ferment what one would like to propose is a floating Afro-Asian university of ideas. Why do we need such an invention?

South-South exchange needs to reinvent itself in new ways. Also, it cannot operate with old categories. We need to throw new life into key words. An Afro-Asian university has to realise that dominance is exercised today through categories that are embedded in systems of knowledge. The challenge today is to define one's life chances in terms of our life worlds. Let us consider a set of key terms either genocidal or life giving or both: Violence, Security, Community, Constitutions, Plurality, Boundaries, Migration, Ecology.

Can an Asian-African university bring new life, new angles to these words so that we look at them in new ways, create new institutions, new inventions around them? What does the re-embedding of democracy mean in terms of these events?

Let us consider one specific concept: Violence. Africa has seen forms of violence India is yet to understand. It has seen the virtual collapse of states through a privatisation that makes the Emergency look socialist. It has witnessed the rise of mercenaries, the rise of private armies which are the base of arms proliferation, the narcotics business and banditry. It has witnessed ethnic conflicts which have been even more genocidal than the Partition. It has witnessed drought and ecological devastation, and a search for scapegoats which India may witness in the decades to come as more and more of our cities turn into slums.

The challenge before both our societies is: Do we have an alternative theory of violence, brutalisation and an alternative theory of peace? What is the political and literary imagination that can articulate it? What is our notion of living with evil especially as many erstwhile dictators return in democratic garb? What is our notion of history, justice, forgiveness that can make sense of all these nameless holocausts which are occasionally christened as Rwanda?

A South Asian-African dialogue is necessary to reinvent our notions of peace. What began with Gandhi and continued with the Truth Commission needs to be elaborated beyond the inanities of Fanon. Violence, we must add, is only one of the projects that an African transition or an international university can address. It requires new philosophies and histories which must go beyond the shock of reporting to unravelling the cultural politics and the political economy of such a violence.

CHANDRIKA PARMAR

SEMINAR 490 – June 2000

# Globalisation and recolonisation

TAJUDEEN ABDUL-RAHEEM

MODERN Africa's relationship with the world has been primarily shaped by its continuous contact of more than 400 years with Europe involving slavery, colonialism, neocolonialism and, now, the real threat of recolonisation. It has been a relationship of domination, exploitation and oppression. Whatever happens in Europe tends to have ripple effects in Africa. Therefore, any idea that becomes fashionable in Europe trickles down into intellectual and political discussions/battles in Africa.

There is a sense in which the world has become a village. Thanks to CNN and the radical transformation in satellite broadcasting, many places in Africa where it may be difficult to get a clean cup of water, one can still

watch CNN. The irony of this technological advancement is that while Europeans and Americans struggle for supremacy in space, to hoist their flags and compete about who makes it in the shortest time to the highest orbit, in Africa, as in many parts of the Third World, 'we are still trying to get to the village'.

Thus, while people in Europe may well be obsessed by globalisation, we are still talking of villagisation, getting to the village where the majority of our people work and live. The current discussion on globalisation has a particular context, i.e., the collapse of the previously existing socialist block (USSR and Eastern Europe). This discourse has been influenced by ideas and political con-

clusions drawn from books such as Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* and Francis Fukuyama's *End of History*. The theory of end of ideology has of course been with us before Fukuyama's annihilation of history and the triumphalism about the hegemony of western values, ideas and civilization.

The collapse of Eastern Europe has instilled a new arrogance in Euro-American imperialist powers, more so since there is no countervailing force. Thus, there is a drive to homogenize the world at all levels (economic, ideological and political) but more perniciously, at the cultural. Western ideologues insist that we must imagine and organize society in accordance with their values and systems without providing space to any alternative ideology. In this hegemonic scheme, the rest of us are seen as non-starters, or at best latecomers, whose only destiny is to follow the path already trodden by the West.

There is a saying, 'If two elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers.' It is equally true that even if two elephants make love, the grass still suffers. That is the conclusion we, in the Third World, can draw from the Soviet collaboration with the West and the collapse of Eastern Europe. When the USSR and the USA were at each other's throats during the Cold War, we were victims. Our political groups and movements, governments and states, were judged depending upon whether they were pro-West or pro-East. The tragic consequences of that experience is evident in places like Angola, Ethiopia, Somalia and Mozambique.

What is worrying about the current discourse of globalisation is the absence of a historical context and political responsibility in discussing the Third World, especially Africa. We are seen as the 'problem continent',

'forgotten continent', as 'poor cousins of the rich North.' Without contextualising the various conflicts on the continent, we tend to be classified as a bunch of hopeless people incapable of doing anything for ourselves, a continent and a people needing help, charity cases and humanitarian junkies. Yet our countries and the perennial conflicts did not come out of the blue.

What are Somalia, Liberia or Nigeria but artificial states created by European colonialism. They are the product of a previous globalising mission: one of colonialism. The infamous Berlin Conference of 1884-85 was convened to rationalise European imperial greed. It was an attempt by the then dominant European powers to resolve the colonial question in Africa by reducing competition through parcelling out exclusive markets and labour reserves.

That is why we have 54 odd and ugly countries today with arbitrary borders – a nightmare for any sensible cartographer – many of them straight lines drawn up by drunken colonialists and their cohorts playing around with the odd assembly of maps, rulers and compasses. Where straight lines would not do, they compromised around principles like natural boundaries (i.e. rivers, mountains and lakes!).

There are many anecdotes about the whimsical ways in which European colonialists framed the borders and, therefore, wrote the subsequent history, culture and politics of the colonial peoples. Take for instance the Kilimanjaro mountain (the highest mountain in Africa) and the one million people who live around it. It was part of colonial Kenya until a British monarch, stuck about what birthday gift to give to the German Kaiser, decided on a 'cute little mountain in Africa.' And with that the fate

of the people was determined. For instance, education which was conducted till then in English had to change to German, the language of the colonial power in Tanganyika (since 1965 called Tanzania). We cannot talk about the problems of nation building in Africa today without understanding or focusing on the way in which these borders were created for the convenience, greed and vanity of Europe's rulers.

There is widespread concern that this new globalisation, as in the past, is inseparable from westernisation and Americanisation. The collapse of Eastern Europe has helped to popularise a new orthodoxy, that there is no alternative to western capitalism, as a new global religion. In Africa the record of capitalism does not match this myth. While peoples in Eastern Europe may claim that they are running away from socialism/communism (even though current developments there have tempered earlier capitalist optimism with realism), the majority of African states were never socialist. Therefore, our people cannot be running away from it.

What we are running away from is the brutality and mass poverty that continues to dominate our lives under global capitalism. A majority of our states remain loyal servants of the West and its markets, and yet, most of them cannot show growth, let alone substantial development, even in richer countries like Nigeria, Zaire, South Africa, Senegal or Ivory Coast. This newly received wisdom about the market rings hollow in African ears because capitalism in our countries has neither been democratic or developmental.

The reality is that the West/America controls our economies and exercises politico-military hegemony over the global political economy. Our

subordination is supervised and guaranteed under the tight leash of allegedly multilateral institutions of which we are technically and theoretically equal members, such as the U.N., the Breton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organisation and so on.

**T**he International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (IMF/WB) directly control of most of the African states and spread western economic gospels to states who cannot afford to resist. They advance global solutions to all problems regardless of local specificities, somewhat like the ever present quack pharmacists and doctors found in our cities peddling concoctions that claim to cure all diseases, from ant bites to high blood pressure! The Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) proposed by these institutions call for deregulation (read devaluation) of currency markets and the monetary system, privatisation of public enterprises, retrenchment of public employees, liberalisation of the economy, cut-backs in welfare programmes and, more generally, a return to a Hobbesian state of nature where human beings become predators on fellow human beings in the name of 'free competition' and 'survival of the fittest'.

Let me give a personal example of the havoc that such policies have created for our people. I was born and brought up in the northern part of Nigeria, a region that is historically less developed (in terms of western education, modern industries etc.) than the southern part of the country. This is largely because colonial trade, commerce and Christian missionaries and their schools came in through the coast, thereby giving coastal populations an advantage in the incorporation into global capitalism. The historically uneven nature of capitalist development accentuated disad-

vantages that were often exploited politically to buy off opponents, seal up support or neutralise resistance, and thereby prolong colonial rule.

Since Independence, political attempts have been made to bridge the gap between the North and South of Nigeria. My generation and probably the next couple of generations of post-independence children in Northern Nigeria were beneficiaries of that affirmative action. We went to school virtually free (primary/secondary education). There were also generous scholarships for those lucky enough to go up to the university. However, despite education being free, less than 50% of children of school going age actually went to school. Of this proportion only a minority made it to higher education and university degrees. If poor parents did not take advantage of zero-fees to educate their children, is it likely that under IMF/WB liberalization and cost-sharing that has seen school fees sky rocket, they will send their children to school? How can they afford this when education is competing with family food, as the economies are privatized and people become poorer? In such a context, a state policy that relies exclusively on markets can never work to the benefit of the vast majority.

**G**lobalised markets not only work against a majority of workers and peasants, even the local and indigenous capitalist classes suffer from its crushing impact. Small enterprises with a low capital base cannot compete with the big financial and industrial establishments of the West – the multinational corporations – and their enormous political influence. No wonder the beneficiaries of privatization have been foreign business interests. The logic of global markets dictates that we produce what we are best at, just as in colonial times, which

condemns us to commodity production for exports. We produce what we do not consume and consume what we do not produce. And the West/US, that dominates the global political economy dictates prices for both.

In the '50s and '60s the same western development experts, policy makers and planners advocated modernization (i.e., import substitution, industrialisation, westernization through education and transfer of technical and non-technical knowledge) as a panacea to our technological backwardness. In those days even the number of radio receivers per head was used as an index of progress in addition to traditional indices like the rate of urbanization, number of hospitals and doctors, number of schools, percentage of our people who are in 'modern' industry as opposed to those in 'traditional' sectors such as agriculture.

**N**ow, under structural adjustment policies, the modern sector is being steadily dismantled – witness the collapse of our educational systems and other social services and the continuing deindustrialization of the few industries that we do have. The resultant mass retrenchment of workers is producing sprawling cities marked by high unemployment, a lumpen proletariat that has no industry to work in and is removed from agriculture. This is wiping out the middle class and skilled labour force that only a couple of decades ago, was lionized as indispensable for our development by Samuel Huntington and other modernization theorists.

Our problem was located in not being western enough. If only we could be like them, then nothing could stop our march of progress from the 'heart of darkness' to the 'heart of civilisation'. But things did not quite work out the way this unilinear Eurocentric



model envisaged. Colonial capitalism was replaced by neocolonial capitalism without any significant development for a majority of the peoples. What Africa is now experiencing is re-colonisation, not by individual European countries but under theegis of IMF/WB and the supportive and collaborative service of western bilateral/multilateral aid increasingly fun and channeled through western NGOs.

**B**oth our reality and the history of how we got there have conditioned our responses. This has created distrust, suspicion, anger and bitterness towards the West and whatever new or repackaged issues it now seeks to impose on the rest of the world. Surprisingly there is an even greater distrust of America (giving rise to anti-Americanism) among those who uncritically consume CNN – most of all the American arrogance, its strutting around the world as global policeman, and its selective use and abuse of the UN to further its narrow interests.

The first direct evidence of this was provided by the American invasion of Somalia in the winter of 1992, shortly after George Bush proclaimed the new world order, which we know is a new world disorder. Somalia provided the first test of how this disorder would work out in Africa.

There was Bush, a president who had been roundly defeated by a relative newcomer in spite of 'winning' the Gulf War. Keen to counter the tag of being a 'wimp', he wanted to go out, literally, with a bang. The humanitarian tragedy occasioned by the clan warfare in Somalia provided the excuse. To prove that he was a 'real man', Bush decided to sort out General Aideed and put in place a 'responsible government'. He planned for the boys to be back home before X'mas to salute their retiring commander-

in-chief before he bowed out of office in January 1993. With that Bush hoped his reputation would be enhanced and he would be rehabilitated as a commander for conflict resolution around the world, making the world safer for democracy, a grand delusion that has afflicted every American president since 1945.

Not surprisingly, he read the situation upside down. Somalia was no Iraq, and Aideed was no Saddam Hussein who provided Americans an opportunity for what J.K. Galbraith called 'painless patriotism' (i.e., a war without or with negligible American casualties) by allowing America and the Allied powers to bomb the country back into the Middle Ages. Somalia was different: laser missiles, collateral bombing and aerial high tech were of no use. It was a street brawl, literally, man to man. The Americans, overloaded by the arsenal of the latest high-tech military hardware were trapped by roving bands of clansmen with primitive weaponry.

**A**s is the case with the politics and diplomacy of the new globalisation, the Americans then sought to convert their unilateral intervention into a UN mandate, even though they had gone in without consulting the UN, let alone the African states, the OAU and least of all the Somalis they claimed to be helping. Had they succeeded it would have been another victory for the leader of the Free World. Their failure, however, became a global failure, an emergency for the so-called international community. Whatever concerns America and its allies is a global issue; what they are not interested in becomes by definition a 'threat to world peace and security.'

For instance, in February 1996 there was a big conference in Cairo. It was attended by all the African states who, after a lot of arms twisting, force,

bribery and intimidation, were persuaded to sign the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT). There was also another meeting in Geneva. It was also about arms, specifically, a ban on the manufacture and sale of landmines throughout the world. This meeting produced no consensus because landmines were not seen as a threat to the West.

**N**one of the African states (apart from a couple) who assembled like school pupils in Cairo had any nuclear capacity, nor can they ever develop one. But the issue of nuclear arms concerns the West; they must not be in the wrong hands (meaning non-European/American hands apart from China and Israel). Therefore, a legal framework for their restriction had to be guaranteed internationally so that any breach could be punished under international law and a liberal use of coercion (economic sanctions, military threat) by the West/USA.

However, when it comes to landmines (which all the African states and the Third World have unlimited access to from the western arms industry; some of those who cannot feed themselves are self-sufficient in landmines!) there could not be a universal ban. Instead, a curious compromise was reached. It was decided that the current landmines which have a long life would be phased out, only to be replaced by a new generation of landmines which self-detonate after a couple of years. What a compromise for global security! Pray, what is to happen in the two years before the new mines automatically detonate themselves? Is this a solution for the people of Angola who reportedly have over ten million mines strewn across their country?

A majority of our peoples are being killed or maimed by so-called conventional light weapons, includ-

ing landmines, most of which are imported from western armament industry, extended as part of military/security aid or procured by private arms dealers. Only a few African countries like South Africa, Egypt, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe have a sizeable domestic arms industry. The West dominates the industry (inspite of competition from a few Latin American and Asian countries like Brazil, China, India, Chile and Pakistan). That is why there can be no agreement on light weapons and landmines.

These ambiguities and blatant hypocrisy in the globalisation processes is fuelling distrust and suspicion in Africa. Of course, the West is not the only profiteer in this deadly game. African and other Third World despots, arms dealers and rogue regimes too are beneficiaries of the blood industry, both materially and politically. They can use them to keep their people down.

**A**lmost without exception, the despots who have messed up their countries and looted the treasuries, keep their investments and maintain real estates in Europe and America. For instance, Mobutu of Zaire (in power since 1965 thanks to the CIA, the French and Belgians and the UN who actively supported or just looked on as he allegedly assassinated the elected prime minister of his country, Patrice Lumumba) was one of the richest individual presidents in the world.

One does not need any super intelligence to deduce who owes whom. Yet Zaire (now Democratic Republic of the Congo) and its future generations is loaded with a debt crisis created by Mobutu and his hirelings. The story can be repeated for many other African countries. These fortunes are kept in Europe and America whose governments and aid agencies continue to lecture us on financial probity,

transparency and accountability in managing our economies and politics. Consequently, these issues are seen as yet another western ploy. The distrust is so great that many of us have an almost instinctive reaction to anything western. It is a new Cold War. If the West says come this way, our scarred memories of previous obeisance impel us to go the other way.

**A**nother aspect of globalisation is the prospect of creating global citizenship and governance and removing borders and barriers to trade and investment. Borders have indeed come down for Europeans. However, they have gone up in Europe against Africans and other Third World citizens. While Europeans and Americans are truly global citizens because their passports give them unhindered entry into all parts of the world, the same is not true for us even on our own continent.

One does not have to go to the Third World in order to 'discover' it. Every major city in Western Europe has its own Third World within – immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers or 'guest workers' as they call them in Germany. They are often the poorest of the poor, victims of all kinds of racist discrimination in medical care, housing, law and order. In some states of America, children of immigrants are denied education or medical care unless they can prove the legal immigration status of their parents. Whatever the economic, social or political problems facing the working people of Europe and America, the Third World within them suffers even more. And their status in Europe is a reflection of the place of their countries of origin globally.

Thus the globalisation hysteria can only legitimise the right of the advanced capitalist states and their citizens to dominate the rest of humanity. It affirms the right of capital to

move around the globe but restricts the freedom of labour (people). Those who desire a global humanity must, therefore, struggle to humanise the globe such that free human beings can live work or settle anywhere they wish.

Globalisation also calls for : respect for human rights and demands steps towards democratisation in Africa – a call to liberalise the economy as also the politics. True, Africa needs democracy, just like it needs clean air. We cannot have development, social progress and democracy without the fullest participation of the greatest number of our people. However, there is suspicion about both the intention and the arrogant manner in which the West is pushing its pro-democracy agenda.

**H**ow come, people ask themselves, that those who kept our despots and dictators in power in the Cold War era because they were 'moderate' pro-western puppets, now tell us that they want democracy. People also ask why human rights and democratisation are now a condition for aid, grants and loans? Why is nobody asking Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states or the authoritarian states of Southeast Asia to democratise? In Southeast Asia, lack of democracy and gross abuse of human rights do not seem to have affected the growth of capitalism, whereas the Gulf states with their abundant oil wealth can dispense with democracy and human rights altogether. Otherwise, why would America and the so-called Allied powers have gone to war in the Gulf only to restore feudal family rule?

In addition to its lack of consistency in applying the democracy and human rights test in all regions of the world, is the inconsistency in supporting the democratic process in countries where the outcome threatens to bring into power forces/interests that

are seen to be anti-West. Algeria is a case in point. Throughout the Cold War era, the West and its allies (especially the governments of the USA and Saudi Arabia) put pressure on the 'communist' FLN regime by fuelling agitation among the non-Arab Berber minority and the Islamist forces. But as soon as the Berlin Wall fell and the one-party system in Algeria converted into multi-party politics, the tune of the West changed. When it became clear that the 'so called' Islamic fundamentalists, Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) were going to win in the national parliamentary elections, a military coup with the support of the USA and France halted the process.

**T**he issue is not whether or not one likes the policies of the FIS but the efficacy of the principle of people electing those whom they wish to. It seems that the West only prefers a 'democratic' outcome that does not, as the Americans say, upset the applecart. That means democracy with a western veto. Such an attitude can hardly promote long lasting democratic institutions or culture. The misguided short-term interests of imperialism in Algeria resulted in driving the FIS underground with extremists seeking martyrdom acquiring dominance. Any rational outlook is now treated as treachery, a selling-out to the enemy. All this strengthens anti-democratic revolts because democratisation is seen as yet another western import and imposition.

The rise in religious fundamentalism in large parts of Africa is partly a response to the excruciating misery that structural adjustment is imposing on our people. But equally it is a result of a growing anti-western political culture. The West's new obsession with Islam is helping spread the view that 'Islam is the answer', the 'only true' force against western domina-

tion and unipolarism. Fundamentalism in western political and intellectual discourse and media always invariably means Islam, though there is a general rise in religious fundamentalism: Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Islam, American charismatic churches and so on.

**T**he basic misconception about fundamentalism is that non-Islamic fundamentalisms pose no problem particularly if under western control. The problem for the West is that Islam, Arab and oil seem to coincide. For as long as there is no economic alternative energy source to oil and the Middle East remains the biggest supplier, anything that threatens the cozy relationship between the feudalist aristocracies of the area and their western 'partners' will become a 'global' issue. If a majority of Arabs were non Muslims and they had no oil, they would be of no interest to the West. Politically motivated Islamic leaders, denied entry in the political affairs of their country, are able to combine this naked western opportunism and corrupt and despotic local regimes to package simple religion-based welfarist solutions as Allah's will.

This simple philosophical outlook is attractive to the multitudes of the unemployed, disaffected professionals and even nationalist bourgeois elements who are looking for a way out of western clutches. In places like Egypt or Algeria, as in the rest of the Maghreb (and indeed the Arab world), it is often difficult to distinguish between Arab nationalism and Islamism. The more the West hates Islam and does its utmost to protect, defend and maintain corrupt undemocratic 'Islamic' regimes in North Africa and the Middle East, the greater is the revolutionary appeal of Islam. The West's obsession has replaced the old anti-Communist hysteria with

anti-Islam in its periodic reassembly of enemies within and without which need to be crushed.

While Islam represents (among Muslim majorities) both a cultural and spiritual revolt against the Eurocentric cultural orthodoxy of the current globalisation, there are other cultural responses. In many African countries where the neocolonial state system is being replaced by direct control of the state by IMF/WB and western NGOs, both harmony in civil society and loyalty to the central state system (which had never been strong because of the artificial nature of the postcolonial state) is fast waning. Centrifugal forces are growing with people seeking a more realistic collective identity in either precolonial identities or, in some cases, colonially determined regional identities. Being Kenyan, Nigerian or Liberian means little to people when the states cannot protect them, safeguard their property, nor guarantee their security.

**T**he push and pull of the global capitalist restructuring is making many of the African states realise that they have become irrelevant in the international system, save for a few rich or strategically important countries like South Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Nigeria, Ethiopia and Libya.

The African leaders look back with nostalgia to the Cold War era because 'the search for friends and allies' in the play of the West against the East provided opportunity for self importance. It prolonged the lives (and therefore the misery of the people) of these lifeless states. They could always threaten to go to the other side if their demands were not met. There are now no sides (at least in the emerging global power nexus) to defect to. The Red Bear of communism has been tamed. The last surviving big commu-

nist power, China, had made its peace with imperialism long before the Soviet edifice crumbled. It is only interested in promoting trade, not its ideology. It is in no position to compete with the West for political influence over the Third World.

**T**herefore, Africa's cold warriors are left out in the cold. Their response is a renewed interest in regional organizations, which they had earlier paralysed due to lack of political will. Thus, there is a renewed enthusiasm in regional economic and political institutions like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Southern Africa Development Cooperation Council (SADCC), East African Cooperation (EAC), Preferential Trade Area of East, Central and Southern African States (PTA), COMESA (Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa states) and the Maghreb Union. Even the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), through the Abuja Treaty of 1991 and the Harare summit declaration of 1997, is committed to the establishment of an African Economic Community during the first quarter of the next century.

These institutions are not functioning as they should for many reasons, but mainly because most African states remain neocolonial economies under the control of both the former colonial masters and the MNCs. Their economies are structured to serve the needs of foreign capital, as competitive instead of being complimentary. They are tied to the production of primary commodities like cotton, groundnuts, cocoa, rubber, gold, diamonds and so on. These are commodities with insignificant internal markets; rather they serve as raw materials for western countries who in turn sell most of our finished products to us. This political economy of 'pro-

ducing what you do not consume and consuming what you do not produce' has made our economies vulnerable to external shocks given the unfair terms of international trade that is dominated, fixed and manipulated by the rich industrialised countries.

The Cold War had distorted this reality and mediated it with pockets of 'developing' enclaves to produce import-substitution goods on behalf of MNCs. Now that globalisation is forcing a painful restructuring in the North and a brutal adjustment in the South, we are witnessing a rationalization of industry, trade, commerce and a growth of investments necessitating new intracontinental and intercontinental adjustments.

The European Union, the NAFTA agreement by the USA, and the Japanese/Chinese push for dominance in the Asia-Pacific region are examples of this new reality. African states too hope to be relevant by promoting regional trade, commerce and investment.

**T**he reality of today dictates bigger unions. Therefore, if Pan Africanism did not exist earlier, it would have been invented now. This reality is forcing a confluence of Pan African ideas in many sectors of our society – civil and governmental, business and professional. This regionalisation is different from what people in Europe are talking about. They (the West) want local control and autonomy in the face of over-weaning states and corporations. We, on the contrary, need to renew the capacity and legitimacy of our state structures within a wider Pan African framework. Our motto, therefore, is not 'small is beautiful'; our historical circumstances demand that we become big enough (economically) so as to advance the collective interests of our many small states.

# The state, constitutionalism and democratization

JULIUS O IHONVBERE

Most (transitions in Africa) have turned out to be false starts; the democratization has often been shallow...But the pressures for democratization are so strong that for most of Africa it is no longer a question of whether there will be a democratic transition but when.<sup>1</sup>

THE current wave of political liberalization in Africa has witnessed unprecedented and monumental changes in the region's political landscape. In fact, probably more than any other developing region, Africa has witnessed far-reaching changes which have impacted socio-economic, political and cultural relations, with profound implications for the region's location and role in the emerging complex and competitive global divisions of labour and power.

Fed up with the suffocation of civil society, repression, corruption, and economic mismanagement, popular constituencies began to resist and reject undemocratic leaders and forms of governance. Workers, students, women, rural and urban asso-

ciations, even sections of the military, joined in the agitation for political liberalization and a return to democratic politics and governance. Of course, the results have varied from country to country and from experience to experience. Generally, there is today no nation in Africa that is isolated from the wave of protests, agitations for change, and popular enthusiasm for democratic rule. All African states have witnessed the emergence of new pro-democracy movements, leaders, political parties and issues on the political agenda.

Perhaps, the most resounding manifestation of the 'second liberation' was in apartheid South Africa which was forced by a combination of internal and external factors and forces to acknowledge the inevitability of political pluralism and majority rule. Countries like Togo, Benin, Mali, Cameroon, Malawi, Zambia, Senegal and Uganda have not been left out of this new wave. So intense and robust is the new wave of liberalization that it is being generally referred to as

1. Claude Ake, *Democracy and Development in Africa*, The Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., 1996, p. 136

Africa's 'second revolution' or 'second liberation'!

In this short contribution, we look at the factors and forces which gave rise to the new wave, the nature of the contestations, the constraints to democracy, and the future of democracy in Africa.

It is not uncommon in policy and academic circles to attribute the current liberalization processes in Africa entirely to the developments in Eastern Europe. To be sure, the largely unanticipated and unprecedented developments in Eastern Europe, in particular the collapse of the Soviet Union as a nation state and superpower, did give impetus to the struggles as most Africans came to see that no matter how brutal and well-armed a regime was, it could be overthrown. However, it is important to point out that the struggles for democracy, accountability, popular participation in decision-making and good governance in Africa, date way back to the 1960s and the failure of the nationalist project.<sup>2</sup>

**A**s the new elites and nationalists appropriated the powers and privileges of the departing colonial lords, they initiated complex programmes of exploitation, discrimination, marginalization, concentration of power and resources in urban areas, and intolerance. They depoliticized the

people, sacked opposition parties, instituted brutal one-party states, looted the treasury, and relied on defensive radicalism and diversions to reproduce the political system.

Within a few years of political independence, Africa became perceived in the eyes of the world as a continent awash with dictatorships – and bound to misery, incompetence, corruption, violence and misplaced priorities. It was at this time that peasants, workers, students, women, the unemployed, the marginalized, professionals, trade unions, students and their unions, began to initiate overt and/or covert modes of resistance against the neo-colonial state, its institutions and custodians.

**I**n addition to this important historical point, however, we can identify a set of factors which have directly influenced the processes of democratic renewal in Africa:

1. The end of the Cold War which witnessed a drastic reduction in military and financial support for Africa's dictators. The West, now preoccupied with a series of internal and regional problems, became unwilling to tolerate or subsidize the political excesses of many African leaders.
2. The imposition of new political conditionalities by western nations, as well as by multilateral organizations, credit clubs and other donors and international organizations, forced African leaders to accommodate new political demands and embrace political pluralism. As foreign aid, investment and technical support became anchored on political pluralism, respect for human rights, environmental protection, and so on, it dawned on the dictators, especially the military juntas, that a new global political dispensation was being established.
3. The delegitimization of the state, its custodians and institutions, contri-

buted significantly to the democratization process. The African state simply lost its credibility and ability to govern. It could not pay salaries, repair roads, provide drugs in hospitals and maintain security. Most African capitals were taken over by armed robbers and gangsters. Debt, debt-servicing, corruption, the legacy of privatizing and plundering the public sphere and decades of insensitivity to the needs of the people, further eroded the ability of the state to take charge, redirect national politics and exercise control.

**T**he state could not pay local and foreign contractors. Suppliers simply refused to do business with states that were rapidly becoming bankrupt. The state could not conduct national censuses, could not maintain peace and order, lacked a capacity to maintain a rural-urban balance and could not protect the environment. As corruption and waste spread all over the continent, the state remained helpless. It increasingly became totally 'irrelevant' to the people as far their daily lives and survival were concerned: it was a wicked, distant, corrupt, violent, aloof, irresponsible, elite-dominated and useless state.<sup>3</sup> The people, their communities and organizations, realized this fact and took advantage of the openings to challenge the state.

4. The deepening economic crisis in Africa was, in several respects and in spite of the pains it has caused, a blessing in disguise. The UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) declared the 1980s as Africa's lost decade. The failed adjustment programmes had deepened existing ten-

3. See Julius O. Ihonvbere, 'The "Irrelevant" State, Ethnicity and the Quest for Nationhood in Africa', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 17(1), January 1994, pp. 42-60, Claude Ake, 'The State in Contemporary Africa', in Ake (ed), *Political Economy of Nigeria*, Longman, London and Lagos, 1985, pp. 1-8

sions, contradictions; coalitions, and conflicts. Africa was clearly the only continent that entered the 1990s with a negative on all indicators of development. The World Bank in its 1989 report pointed out that Africans were worse-off in the 1990s than they had been at the time of political independence! Deepening poverty, unemployment, inflation, infrastructural decay, social crisis, urban dislocation, hunger, contracting or expensive social services and uncertainty, alienated the people from the government and its institutions.

**B**y the beginning of the 1990s, the continent had lost all economic credibility and owed over \$300 billion in debt. Africa not only became the most 'debt distressed' region of the world, but also the most risky to invest in. Unable to provide security and hope to the people, under pressure from creditors, and totally unable to guarantee basic services, the region's economic crisis delegitimized the state and its custodians, alienated the people and their communities, and redirected support and loyalties to opposition and ethnic movements. As the state became desperate for survival, it lost touch with reality, moved from error to error, and came to rely more on intimidation and repression to reproduce itself. Such repressive actions simply strengthened the opposition and bought it global support. The struggle for survival easily meshed with the struggle for democracy.

5. The emergence of new leaders, political parties, organizations, and pro-democracy movements also invigorated the struggle for democracy. As international organizations, NGOs, western leaders, lenders and donors, all came to endorse good governance and democracy, local leaders received a boost. The trend was set in 1989 when the World Bank, for the very first

time in its history in Africa, openly focused on the *political* dimensions of the African predicament. Advocating good governance, gender equality, decentralization of power, human rights, the need to check corruption and waste, and the empowerment and involvement of the people in decision-making, the Bank abandoned its previous economic interpretation of the African crisis.

The opposition in Africa followed up on this new position which was at par with those of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and ECA. They were not only able to articulate an alternative agenda to the people, but also mobilized financial, material, and political support from the outside world. In the context of systemic decay, alienation, and grinding poverty, the new leaders, politicians and movements organized and mobilized the people in a massive challenge to dictatorship.

6. Finally, we must mention the reinvigoration of civil society-based movements, the construction of alternative political platforms, the abandonment of old ideological basis of politics, and the increasing unpopularity of military rule. As well, a willingness by some elites to salvage whatever was left of the control they exercised over the state by abandoning the dictators and reaching some accommodation with the new opposition provided widespread support (even if conservative in several respects) to the democratic enterprise. How did African leaders respond to these demands?

**M**any African leaders were indeed taken aback by the spread of the demands and the constituencies they came from. In particular, the incumbent dictators were shocked that Church leaders, irrespective of denomination, openly attacked corruption,

declared support for pro-democracy leaders, called for an end to one-party and one-person rule, and demanded immediate political liberalization. Trade unions, students, rural organizations, workers, women and NGOs, were unanimous in their calls for an end to military rule and forms of dictatorship. The involvement of diverse interests, cutting across ethnic, religious and regional lines, forced the leaders, even hitherto recalcitrant ones, to make concessions to popular organizations, liberalize the political systems, and introduce multiparty politics.

**T**he response has of course, varied according to the strength and unity among the opposition, the degree of enlightenment of the leadership, the extent of external pressures often evidenced in the termination of foreign aid, the exit options open to incumbent leaders, and the dynamics of politics within each social formation. The responses reflected one or a combination of the following:

- \* open competitive elections
- \* guided liberalization
- \* overt and/or covert opposition to pluralism, forcing opposition leaders into exile or throwing them into jail
- \* attempts to divide the opposition through bribery
- \* the registration of scores of new opposition parties, cooperation, and intimidation of opposition leaders
- \* emergency or hurried administrative reforms, cabinet reshuffles, the dramatic sacking of some prominent ministers and advisors
- \* wage increases to striking workers, scholarships to protesting students
- \* the legalization of previously banned opposition parties in their dozens, the release of detainees from detention, general amnesty to exiles
- \* the establishment of scores of panels and task forces to study a range of

issues in the hope of keeping the people busy while the regime reconsolidates

- \* long-drawn out transition programmes usually between three and five years, in the hope of tiring out the opposition, stretching their thin resources, and providing room for divisions

- \* curious forms of endless constitutional debates and reviews, often designed to lay the foundation for a conservative transition that could be relied upon to result in very limited or no change in existing power balances, calling a 'snap election' in the hope of catching the opposition unawares. Part of this strategy also included delaying political activities and campaigns for as long as possible while the incumbent government or ruling one-party continued to organize, mobilize and campaign openly using public funds.

Irrespective of the adopted strategy, the new political movements succeeded in compelling military dictators to accept political pluralism, one-party regimes to allow for more parties, and one-person life-presidential systems to adopt multiparty political systems. The national conference reflects more of a Francophone phenomena which was successfully utilized in several countries.

Unfortunately, despite these monumental changes, Africa's march to democracy is losing steam midway. In no country has democracy been consolidated. In a few cases the democratic process has been rolled back by the military. In Benin Republic, a previously disgraced and defeated military dictator was voted back to power in place of a democratically elected 'new wave' politician. In Kenya, several opposition leaders and activists are openly being bribed to abandon their constituencies and

support the status quo. In Zambia, Frederick Chiluba who was voted into power as part of the democratic wave, has rapidly lost the support of his constituencies. This has culminated in the mushrooming of so-called opposition movements and parties. In Nigeria, leading pro-democracy activists had no qualms about abandoning their constituencies, teaming up with military juntas, and helping to terminate and dismantle democratic institutions and processes. Below, we discuss some of the constraints to democracy in Africa.

**M**ost analysts are rather cautious or pessimistic about the transitions and restored democracies in Africa. It is now realized that formal compliance with liberal democracy, in the final analyses, changes very little. In fact, it is now acknowledged that liberalization is much easier than democratization. 'Formal compliance' has been commonplace in the continent but real changes, evidenced in the drastic and fundamental recomposition of the structures, institutions, patterns and goals of politics, have been very few and far between. Claude Ake is even more direct in his skepticism about the transitions:

With a few exceptions the democratization has been shallow, typically, it takes the form of multiparty elections that are really more of a democratic process than a democratic outcome. Authoritarian state structures remain, accountability to the governed is weak, and the rule of law is sometimes nominal. More often than not, people are voting without choosing.<sup>4</sup>

What then are the constraints to the transition, to regime legitimization, and to democratic consolidation in Africa?

The first major constraint is that the current struggles for democracy lack an ideological content. In most cases, there is a pathological fixation

4. Claude Ake, *Democracy and Development in Africa*, op. cit., p. 137.

on aping World Bank and IMF prescriptions. There is very little creativity or originality. The world is conceived and related to through the eyes of lenders, donors, election monitoring agencies, and foreign funders. While many opposition movements and new political parties have capitalized on the economic and social failings of incumbent regimes, they have provided no concrete alternatives to foreign-packaged prescriptions. Their so-called alternatives hardly reflect the socio-economic and political realities and balances of their respective countries, and they completely ignore the historical experiences and specificities.

**T**o be sure, this struggle to design liberal and rabidly pro-market programmes in order to satisfy foreign interests has also set the path to alienating, exploiting and marginalizing the people. Hence, it did not take long for several new governments to alienate the people. The lack of originality and creativity has resulted in a generally conservative political style based on diversions, lies, manipulation, bribery, violence, election rigging, and an inability to cultivate and nurture new political constituencies. On this score, African politics has not moved a step away from where it was in the 1960s: it is still an activity of the few and the rich with the masses serving as spectators or objects of manipulation.

Though it is true that democracy has spread rather rapidly in Africa, the new pro-democracy movements and political parties have tended to exhibit some common traits: corruption, opportunism, the marginalization of women, concentration in specific regions or urban centres, personalization of politics, confusion, fragmentation, excessive ambition and focus on raw power. The superfi-



cial, defensively radical, opportunistic, diversionary and narrow focus of the organizations, their politics and strategies have eroded their legitimacy, bred confusion, and made it easy for the incumbent governments to penetrate, divide and outmanoeuvre them in the competition for power.

The majority of pro-democracy movements or new political parties in Africa are not interested in the dismantling and reconstruction of the unstable, non-hegemonic, violent, exploitative and inefficient neo-colonial state. Rather, the struggle is to penetrate and take charge of the very same state along with its institutions which the people had hated and challenged since the 1960s. How they hope to use the same repressive state which had shot at children, women, students and protesters yesterday, to mobilize the people for justice, democracy, accountability and mobilization today defies imagination. This is probably the greatest failing of contemporary democratic initiatives, and the reason why the new efforts have inspired so little enthusiasm among non-bourgeois constituencies.

**T**he fact that the new actors and their organizations, like the early nationalists, want to maintain the status quo by keeping the repressive neocolonial state intact, demonstrates the struggle of limited objectives and a fundamental fraud in the new political balances and arrangements. The new elites simply wish to replace the old dictators with 'democratic' oppressors!

The rise of ethnic and social parochialism has become a major constraint to democracy and democratization. While this is not peculiar to Africa, and certainly reflects the emergence of hitherto repressed interests and coalitions, the reality is that ethnicity, statism, regionalism and religion have combined at various lev-

els to weaken the opposition, divide the transition agenda, and militate against the construction of inclusive political platforms.

**I**t is this division, coupled with opportunism (see below), that has made it possible for incumbent leaders in countries such as Namibia, Burkina Faso, Togo, Cameroon, Kenya, and Egypt to outsmart the opposition, splinter and manipulate them, make superficial concessions, and succeed in reducing the entire transition programme to one of mere elections. In the entire continent, these primordial factors have been the bane of a genuine transition to democracy. Many repackaged dictatorships, restored or new democracies have simply been unable to effectively manage the contours and contradictions of ethnicity, religion, region, gender, identity, and non-conformist cultures.

Thus, in spite of a transition to a liberal democratic system, Nigeria remains plagued by ethnic and religious violence. A lack of sensitivity to primordial attachments and sentiments, and the absence of practical programmes for constructing bridges and platforms for pluralism, has emboldened those groups that identify with the leadership and alienated those who feel marginalized or short-changed in the political balances. In some of the new democracies, the 'new' parties and movements lack national appeal, marginalize women, and just like the parties of the 1960s, they manipulate primordial fears and sympathies. This new parochialism is effectively mediating possibilities for constructing a national project and building viable democratic processes and institutions. This way, the new conflicts are tearing apart the foundations of nationhood, unity, stability, and peace constructed since the 1960s.

The proliferation of political parties has been a major constraint to democracy and democratization in contemporary Africa. The continent has never witnessed this sort of deluge in party formation and interest in state power. At one level, party formation is evidence of a robust and vibrant civil society, that opportunities exist for people and communities to organize and express their views and goals. Yet, it is also evidence of a lack of accommodation, consensus, dialogue and a willingness to trust each other, of political greed and opportunism. It is also evidence of the fact that elites with interests far beyond the restoration of democracy have hijacked the political process. This is even more so when we see the refusal of the leaders of these parties to reach accommodation with each other, form viable coalitions, and present common candidates and platforms.

**E**very dismissed minister has formed a political party. African multimillionaires seem to think that wealth must be translated into power as a strategy for total control of the political economy. Hence, they have formed parties, sponsored candidates, and even presented themselves for election to all sorts of political positions. Every political activist sees him/herself as a potential president. The tendency to form new political parties by the day further fragments civil society, confuses the people, encourages bitter politicking, and diverts attention from serious national issues.

In several countries a divided, poorly-led and severely weakened opposition frequently resorted to boycotting local and/or national elections once the impossibility of capturing raw power stared them in the face. Such escapist approaches tended to make it easy for military juntas to civilianize themselves and for dic-

tators to relegitimate their brutal regimes through elections. The 'new' democrats were not reluctant to sell their principles, supporters, platforms and programmes, just to become part of an already discredited and desperate regime. Such actions easily exposed their understanding of opposition politics, and why they are at best, only marginally different from the 'old buzzards' of African politics.

**T**he survival of the old brigade of African politics remains a challenge to the democratization process. True, every African has the legitimate right to participate in national politics. Yet, the so-called old brigade has done so much damage to politics in Africa. They are largely responsible for the contemporary unfavourable, even embarrassing socio-economic and political balances. They have been unable to restructure Africa's location and role in the global divisions of labour and power. In the midst of poverty, pain, hunger, disease, marginalization, and brutal exploitation by local and foreign interests, most of the traditional leadership cadres have become rather soft. They have gotten so used to power and the perquisites of office that their ability to withstand the pains and sacrifices of genuine struggles for empowerment has become limited.

Hence, they are unable to resist imperialism, authoritarianism, military coups, and other abridgments of popular rights. As experience all over Africa has shown, their involvement in contemporary political agitations has culminated in the repackaging of old ideas, dictatorial political styles, and too many compromises with a status quo that needs to be dismantled and discarded. In Eastern and Western Africa in particular, these 'old timers' have ruined the initial progress towards genuine democratization,

intensified reliance on regional and ethnic manipulation, and made a total mess of the struggle to change the character, direction, and content of politics in Africa.

The conduct, profile, and performance of the new wave democrats leaves much to be desired. They are more unreliable, impatient with democracy, corrupt, violent, manipulative, and are openly disinterested in the welfare of the people. To be sure, there are a handful of parties, movements and persons whose patriotism, honesty, vision and clarity cannot be questioned. Unfortunately, they are not just in the minority, but lack the resources and control over their organizations to really call the shots.

**W**ithout exception, it has taken only a few years for the new parties, politicians and movements, to alienate the people and disgrace themselves. In Benin, as mentioned earlier, a democratically elected president was easily unseated, in open elections of course, and replaced by a former military dictator because of, among other factors, the gross abuse of office, non-performance, and the unusually high profile of his spouse and family members in the power structure. In Zambia, some members of the cabinet were openly accused of being involved in drug trafficking, inflation of contracts, nepotism, and land-grabbing.

Some new 'third wave' presidents are more interested in having their photographs imprinted on the national currency! In Ibuahim Babangida's Nigeria, where a pseudo democratic agenda was being crafted before he was unceremoniously chased out of power, the so-called National Assembly was unceremoniously disbanded by the military, and the politicians made a mockery of accountability. The short-lived assembly was prob-

ably the most profligate in that country's history. Within a couple of months, the politicians had squandered the assembly's budget on accommodation, entertainment, and other frivolous expenses. It was so bad that in May 1993, Assembly members were locked out of their rooms by the major hotels in the nation's new capital over huge unpaid debts.

The process of political liberalization in Africa has, inspite of widespread expectations, failed to bring about fundamental and lasting changes. It was expected that the political upheavals and the political rhetoric of the new political leaders would heighten expectations among hitherto exploited, marginalized, oppressed, and intimidated communities and persons. Promises were made about food, water, shelter, health care, better roads, power supply, good schools, loans to farmers, better wages, inflation control, the termination of crime and prostitution, open governance, accountability, respect for human rights, and the involvement of the people in the political processes and in decision-making.

**I**n short, the people were promised a better life. This has not happened in any country. The performance has been so terrible that the 'third wave' has turned into a 'third wail' and the discredited dictators are beginning to look like saints! This is the only way to explain the growing popularity of some former presidents-for-life, military dictators, retired military generals, and persons who were well known for corruption and human rights abuses. Interestingly, many of these previously discredited politicians have recently been encouraged to make a bid for power in the context of declining support for, and disorganization within the ranks of the new democrats.

It is interesting to note that in Nigeria, in the days of the struggle against General Sani Abacha's diabolical dictatorship, one of the leading pro-democracy groups was in reality an association of retired generals, ex-governors, ex-ministers, traditional chiefs, and wealthy businessmen and politicians. As we have seen, the new parties and politicians have been unable to hold their communities and constituencies together.

**P**olitical liberalization in Africa has not improved African economies. It is true that in a handful of nations economic growth is said to be occurring, though this is yet to be reflected in the living conditions of the poor majority. Transitions have equally not attracted foreign investment as earlier anticipated or promised. What has been most evident however, is the continuing privatization of the state and its resources, mismanagement, and exploitation of the already underprivileged. As well, corruption, waste, the creation of extra-large cabinets, sinecure political appointments, and perks for parliamentarians have further put pressure on already scarce resources.

In a majority of Africa's new or restored democracies, liberalization has not meant more freedom for individuals, the media, scholars, and students. Schools have been closed, unions proscribed, social critics jailed, discredited politicians rehabilitated without apology, and media houses raided by security agents, just as it had been under the dictators. For the majority of Africans, despite the suffocating propaganda by African leaders, western governments, and the international media, the political situation in the continent has hardly improved. The politicians have simply become more careful and sophisticated in practicing the usual politics

of manipulation, nepotism, corruption, and repression. Unfortunately, these undemocratic traits and practices can be found in countries run by some of the new democrats!

Finally, the transition processes continues to largely exclude women. A majority of the new parties, human rights organizations, and pro democracy movements are led by men. Most of the cabinets of the 'third wave' governments are dominated by men. Powerful ministerial positions such as defence, foreign affairs, internal affairs and finance, remain the exclusive preserve of men. Less than ten per cent of Africa's parliamentarians are women in a continent where women constitute the hard-working majority. It is doubtful that a political renewal process in which women are still very much invisible can be counted upon to lead to the drastic restructuring of political platforms and spaces.

The exclusion or marginalization of women in the current democratic enterprises has contributed significantly to the inability to penetrate the rural areas, mobilize the so-called informal sectors, galvanize cultural institutions, and has militated against an efficient and effective mobilization of resources locally. This is one reason why the so-called third wave movements focus on the West for resources rather than building local capacity for resource generation. Of course, the implication of a dependent resource generation strategy are too well known to be recounted here.

**I**rrrespective of the points made above, the transition processes have been good for Africa in several ways. If for no other reasons, the processes need to be supported and encouraged because the transformation of the content and context of politics is proceed-

ing at a rapid rate. Until the late 1980s, many African despots used to openly boast, with confidence and arrogance, that they had no time for multiparty politics; that it would only promote ethnic violence; that they would crush pro-democracy activists 'like rats' or feed them to their pet crocodiles. It is a mark of achievement that such unguarded boasts have disappeared from public, as of private statements by African leaders who now spend most of their time plotting how to contain the opposition or survive the new pressures for change.

**T**he humiliating defeat of despots like Kamuzu Banda in open elections in 1994 and the humbling of Robert Mugabe in the constitutional referendum in February 2000 are clear indications that the context of political engagements is changing in Africa. The constraints and contradictions mentioned above can be regarded as part of the processes of transformation and reconstruction. Very positive examples are being set by several African nations with implications for inclusion, tolerance, leadership, accommodation, negotiation, accountability, and other features of pluralism. Among other positive outcomes of the transition in Africa, we can identify:

- \* the general acceptance of political openness, multiparty politics, and tolerance for opposition leaders and politics;
- \* the creation of thousands of parties, movements, NGOs, and organizations dedicated to the advancement of the popular will,
- \* increased international interest in Africa's political renewal and recovery especially by western nations, the UN and its agencies and international NGOs;
- \* the reintroduction of new discourses on political and social reconstruction, human rights, the environment,

minority rights, and other themes which, until recently, were branded as subversive;

- \* the organization of political action beyond primordial lines as evidenced in the creation of central organizations which bring together several political movements;

- \* the emergence of a new cadre of leadership schooled in new ideas, strategies, and hopes for Africa;

- \* the increasing unpopularity of military juntas and other forms of dictatorships in the continent and the open disposition of other African countries not to provide automatic recognition to such regimes; and

- \* a renewed interest in the rule of law, constitutionalism, press freedom, and political and social networking against corruption and manipulation.

These developments and tendencies are still weak in many countries and regions, yet they do reflect the direction in which African politics will likely go if capacity-building is facilitated, the state reconstructed, and civil society strengthened. Below we look at the various proposals for achieving this goal. In some countries in The Horn, Eastern and Southern Africa, bold and ingenuous constitutional pacts and arrangements have been initiated to reduce, if not contain, divisive tendencies, acknowledge minority rights, and promote social and political pluralism. Such developments have significantly heightened the popular enthusiasm for democracy all over Africa.

In spite of the frustrations with ongoing liberalization programmes, the challenge of the present is how to expand, deepen and strengthen the democratic process. It is necessary to articulate an agenda for strengthening the new political parties and pro democracy movements, strengthening civil society, checking military

adventurism, curtailing the irresponsibility and idiosyncrasies of the political elites, and promoting the interests of the people.

Clearly, for most new wave politicians, politics has little to do with mobilization, education, bridge-building, election of the best candidates to office, internal democracy within parties, articulation of public interests, confidence-building in the state and its institutions, and in constructing lasting political institutions and cultures. Rather, politics is still perceived as a business, an investment from which successful candidates reap maximum benefits. It is still seen as an opportunity to seize and privatize the state, its institutions and resources; loot the treasury; use the means of coercion to liquidate the opposition; and engage in primitive accumulation.

Overall, it would appear that the creation of an *enabling* environment for political organization, mobilization, alignment and realignment of political forces is critical not only to the nurturing and survival of the democratic process but also to its consolidation. The World Bank, in its 1989 report on Sub-Saharan Africa was emphatic on this point. In his introduction to the report, Barber Conable noted that an '*enabling environment* for the productive use of resources and efforts at building *African capacities*' are necessary for overall recovery.<sup>5</sup>

The African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) has outlined the basic requirements for capacity building and for ensuring good governance which in turn is an essential requirement for democratic sustainability and consolidation. The conditions for

'a strong enabling environment' include: political stability, stability of economic policies, government autonomy, professionalism of civil servants, improved government efficacy (good governance), establishment of a 'developmental elite', widespread confidence in capacity building, and demand for local capacity.<sup>6</sup>

To attain these goals 'good governance' must be the overall framework reflecting: accountability, 'existence of institutions and mechanisms to enforce government accountability and to redress transgressions', transparency and consistency in government decision-making, openness and availability of information, 'introduction of the rule of law for the conduct of government business', 'open dialogue and deliberation' in policy making, an environment conducive to 'independent thinking and free expression', professionalism in the public services, job satisfaction, especially through adequate remuneration for researchers and policy analysts, political stability and security.<sup>7</sup>

Without doubt, these are very important. Yet, it is important that we do not ignore the constraints of a marginal location and role in the global division of labour, a fragmented and largely unproductive and dependent dominant elite, deep-rooted structural contradictions, negative coalitions and conflicts, and the continuing influence and power of a repressive, unstable and desperate state. These issues must be addressed before we can seriously speak of 'capacity building' or 'good governance'.

6. 'An Enabling Environment for Capacity Building', *Quarterly Newsletter* of the African Capacity Building Foundation 2(1), October 1994, pp. 1 and 7

7. 'Governance and Capacity Building', *Quarterly Newsletter* of the African Capacity Building Foundation 3(1), January 1995, pp. 1 and 7

5. Barber Conable, 'Foreword', in World Bank, *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth—A Long-Term Perspective Study*, World Bank, Washington, D C., 1989, p. 12.

Pierre du Toit has suggested a set of 'incentives for sustaining democracy' with emphasis on southern African nations but quite relevant to other developing formations. This 'incentive based approach' emphasizes appropriate constitutional rules to regulate the relationships between politicians and their supporters, regional institutions to mobilize and involve the grassroots in politics to facilitate 'state distribution of goods' and to 'decentralize power', and an autonomous state to contain, if not eliminate 'parochial sentiments and practices' in the political process.<sup>8</sup>

**W**ithout doubt this is a starting point. A critical factor has been why the state is so central in the political process. The non-autonomization of the state is the direct precipitate of the weaknesses of civil society and the weaknesses and tenuous relations of the dominant classes to productive activities. In fact, this tenuousness has turned the state into a means of survival and the main mode of production/accumulation for the elites. What this means is that until appropriate policies and programmes are put in place to promote the relative autonomy of the state, it would remain weak, unsteady, unstable, and totally incapable of effectively mediating the relations within and between social classes and political constituencies.

Claude Ake, the late Nigerian social scientist, articulated the sort of democracy 'Africa needs'. Ake was of the view that:

In Africa political authoritarianism prevents the crystallization of the state or even of a political class. Rather, it tends to constitute a plurality of 'informal' primary groups that are largely the repository of loyalties. It unleashes powerful centrifugal forces that render the

polity incoherent and unable to establish a common purpose, including a development project, and to pursue it effectively. In short, political authoritarianism is an important reason why the development project in Africa has not been able to take off.<sup>9</sup>

Because development has been unable to take off, the custodians of state power remain under intense pressure. This pressure compels the state and its agents to initiate complex ways of survival and in the process manipulate primordial loyalties to the maximum, thus further eroding the already tenuous legitimacy of the state. This is part of the reasons for violence, authoritarianism, the suffocation of civil society, and the squandering of scarce resources on security and the military.

**T**hose who control power do not want to give it up because it is essentially the basis of their survival; those who are marginalized from the state and power see the state as their problem and strive to either take it over or to subvert it in every way possible. Ake is of the view that Africa must go beyond the liberal democratic plane to democratize the society by strengthening civil society because only a 'vibrant civil society' can protect citizens against the state.<sup>10</sup> This, according to Ake, requires a transcendence of the current undue emphasis on elections, important as these might be: 'in the hurry to globalize democracy in the wake of the cold war, democracy has been reduced to the crude simplicity of multiparty elections to the benefit of some of [the] world's most notorious autocrats...who are now able to parade democratic credentials without reforming their repressive regimes.'<sup>11</sup>

To overcome this pseudo liberalization, Ake suggests that:

9. Claude Ake, *Democracy and Development in Africa*, opcit., p. 129.

10 Ibid., p. 130

11. Ibid

a) The consolidation and deepening of the process must include the establishment of a democracy 'in which people have some real decision making power over and above the formal consent of electoral choice.' This will of course include 'a powerful legislature, decentralization of power to local democratic formations, and considerable emphasis on the development of institutions for the aggregation and articulation of interests.'<sup>12</sup>

b) A social democratic agenda that 'places emphasis on concrete political, social, and economic rights', rather than mere abstract political rights. Its core values will revolve around the 'improvement of people's health, education, and capacity so that they can participate effectively.'

c) An emphasis on collective as against individual rights. This sort of democracy will respond directly and openly to primordial contradictions and conflicts by recognizing 'nationalities, subnationalities, ethnic groups, and communities as social formations that express freedom and self-realization and will have to grant them rights to cultural expression and political and economic participation.'<sup>13</sup> This could take the establishment of special legislative chambers, consociational arrangements at all levels of governance, and proportional representation as well as special electoral formula.

d) A democratic process which pays full attention to the politics of incorporation bringing in mass movements, students, workers, women, ethnic associations and communities, all regions and religions, youth, labour movements, women's groups, and all other marginalized interests and constituencies.

To achieve the above, Ake suggests a rapid democratic development

8. Pierre du Toit, *State Building and Democracy in Southern Africa: Botswana, Zimbabwe, and South Africa*. U.S. Institute of Peace Press, Washington, D C., 1995, pp 234-238

9. Claude Ake, *Democracy and Development in Africa*, opcit., p. 129.

10 Ibid., p. 130

11. Ibid

12 Ibid., p. 132.

13. Ibid.

agenda, a reinvigoration of the productive and management capacities of African elites, regaining control of the economy by the state and its custodians, reformulation of the structural adjustment programme away from the 'one-sided emphasis on privatization, denationalization, and reliance on market forces,'<sup>14</sup> and an increased utilization and reliance on non governmental organizations and community-based associations. As Ake concludes: 'A major asset to democratization in Africa is the growing realization that there is no alternative to participative development.'<sup>15</sup>

**T**his line of reasoning not only directs attention at the criticality of the state but broadens the meaning of democracy by emphasizing its socio-economic content. After all, if the people do not perceive tangible changes in their lives and if the numerous promises made by the elites and the parties are not met after a couple of years, the honeymoon blows over and the democratic process falls into jeopardy. How then do we know if an African country is making steady (even if painful and difficult) progress towards democracy and democratization?

The Africa Governance Programme at the Carter Centre developed a Quality of Democracy Index (QDI) several years ago, which included: access of social groups, autonomy of associations, constitutionalism and the rule of law, electoral process, freedom of assembly and association, freedom of conscience and expression, respect for human rights, independence of the judiciary, freedom of the media, and the control of the military by civilian authorities.<sup>16</sup>

Without doubt these are important requirements which provide open and general insights into the value of a nation's democratic culture. Unfortunately, they assume too many things. The most important assumption is about the kind of state which has to be constructed before these can be guaranteed. Can the same neo-colonial, repressive and unsteady non-hegemonic state, perhaps with minor modifications, be relied upon to put in place all or most of the requirements of the QDI? More importantly, the QDI does not seem to pay adequate attention to the social, economic and cultural dimensions of democracy. These should be added to make the QDI more holistic and relevant to the needs and hopes of the majority of Africans.

**A**debayo Adedeji, the former executive secretary of the ECA, has argued emphatically that if the current process of liberalization is to be sustained, and if Africa is to effectively be part of the 21st century, 'it must undergo a second liberation which will result in the birth of a continent where democracy, political and economic empowerment, accountability and social justice prevail.'<sup>17</sup> In fact, he contends that the sustainability of democracy is much more important and more challenging than its initiation.

Adedeji then lists three main preconditions for sustaining the democratic process in Africa. First, 'the most careful and continuous nurturing of the process' to avoid divisions and polarization which could become 'dysfunctional and counterproductive'. Second, is the 'widespread existence of indepen-

dent people's organizations' which must be 'genuinely grassroot, voluntary, democratically administered, and self-reliant.' These organizations must, of necessity, be 'rooted in the tradition and culture of the society so as to ensure community empowerment and self-development.'

**A** third requirement for the sustenance of the democratic process is to cultivate a political tradition that treats the process as both 'an end and a means', with emphasis on human rights and human dignity, freedom of thought and association, and the pursuit of happiness which are achievable only in a democratic environment. This environment is required to facilitate the region's recovery from its deepening crisis. This recovery process must be human-centred to ensure 'the well-being of the people through sustained improvement in their living standards. Unless this takes place, anti-democratic forces and sentiments may re-emerge and triumph.'<sup>18</sup> The strength of Adedeji's postulations can be found in the emphasis on people as the makers of history, the builders of communities and institutions, and as the initiators of political traditions and processes.

Adedeji's human-centred ideas are more elaborately articulated in the 1990 *African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation* which outlines the strategies for promoting popular, people-centred development and the strengthening of civil society. The charter was preceded by the *African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes (AAF-SAP)* which had been a direct response to the IMF/World Bank's orthodox adjustment package. The adoption of the *African Charter* in February 1990 was

14. Ibid., p 133

15. Ibid., p. 134.

16. 'Introducing the Quality of Democracy

Index', *Africa Demos* 2(3), August 1992, pp 8-9.

17. Adebayo Adedeji, 'Sustaining Democracy', *Africa Report*, January-February 1992, p. 29.

18. Ibid., p. 31.

therefore a further attempt to provide an alternative framework for operationalizing or implementing the contents and prescriptions of the AAF-SAP within a people-centred democratic environment.

**I**ts main strength lies in its redirection of attention to the *political* dimensions of the African predicament: that the deepening crisis is as political as it is social, economic, human, and legal. Until the political process is opened up, popular communities democratized and strengthened, institutions made more efficient and accountable, leaders become responsible and sensitive to the needs of the people, and civil society is strengthened, the Charter is clear on the fact that the continent's crisis will continue to deepen. Its specific prescriptions for the state, women, youth organizations, labour, the media, trade unions, NGOs and VDOs, and the international community all carry this singular message of democracy, democratization, empowerment, accountability, mobilization, participation, growth, and development.

Unlike the majority of previous documents on the African crisis, the charter ends by proclaiming the 'urgent necessity to involve the people in monitoring popular participation in Africa' on the basis of indicators already agreed to by African leaders. These indicators include:

- 1) literacy rate as a measure of the capacity for mass participation in public debate, decision-making and general developmental processes;
- 2) the extent of freedom of association especially political association and the presence of democratic institutions such as political parties, trade unions, people's grassroot organization and professional associations;
- 3) the degree of representation of the

people and their organizations in national bodies;

- 4) the extent of the rule of law and social and economic justice including equitable distribution of income and the creation of full employment opportunities;

- 5) the degree of protection of ecological, human and legal environments;

- 6) the extent of press and media freedom as some measure of the extent of public debate;

- 7) the number and scope of functioning grassroots organizations with effective participation in development activities;

- 8) the degree of political accountability of leadership at all levels measured by the use of checks and balances;

- 9) the extent of the implementation of the 1989 Abuja Declaration on Women which emphasized the protection and involvement of women in the development processes; and

- 10) the degree of decentralization of decision-making processes and institutions.

**W**hile the indicators might look rather general and insensitive to the major differences within and between African states, the point must be made that it is a fundamental beginning with potential for establishing a basis for the future. Had African states adhered to such indicators and monitoring schemes in the past, some of the excesses of the ruling classes might have been checked. It is a document that needs to be popularized, given legal recognition and used to further the agenda of democratic development in Africa and elsewhere.

Democracy has taken a beating in Africa. Today, most Africans are confused as to the real meaning and content of democracy. Its recent reduction to elections which are then certified as 'free and fair' by election monitors who promptly depart and

abandon the people to their misery under the leadership of 'democratic dictators' has made the situation even worse. Some leaders continue to see power as their birthright. Constitutions are openly subverted or manipulated by the custodians of the state. Governments have brutalized their people, including democratic governments. More than ever, Africans have begun to appreciate the limitations of liberal democracy in crisis-ridden, dislocated, marginalized and impoverished economies. Liberal democracy has not been accompanied by the pouring in of foreign aid and investments as anticipated.

**W**hat does the future hold for democracy in Africa? Notwithstanding the above problems and the deepening socio-economic crisis, the future of democracy is still bright. In spite of the increasing marginalization of Africa, the continent cannot and should not be neglected by the outside world. Yet, the current crisis, elite opportunism, corruption, and political fragmentation have only strengthened the future of democracy. The crisis, ironically, has been positive in the sense that it has compelled most Africans to forge new alliances, ask new questions, and to advocate new platforms of politics and power.

It is becoming increasingly clear that democracy cannot thrive in Africa if the economic crisis is not addressed. Orthodox prescriptions, in an already devastated economy, will only worsen the situation. Equally, democracy cannot thrive without a reconstruction of the state. The need for an accountable, transparent, democratic, stable, predictable, efficient, and popular national state cannot be over emphasized. The reconstruction will include a restructuring of the military, a transformation of the bureaucracy, a revitalization of the judiciary, constitutional engineer-

ing, the guarantee of basic rights and liberties, and the protection of minority rights. These issues are already being articulated by the environmental movements, human rights and pro-democracy associations, and NGOs.

Finally, whatever the direction in which the region's transition politics goes, civil society must be strengthened. To be sure, civil society can be the location for negative, intolerant and violent politics. Yet, the need to strengthen the people, their constituencies and communities, and the need to involve the people and their organizations in decision-making processes constitute a part of this process of strengthening civil society.

This is the only way to check the opportunism, betrayal, corruption, and excesses of the state and political elites, and pay due attention to issues of gender, environment, popular participation, accountability and responsibility in government. This is also the only way to acknowledge and respect the interests of minorities, contain or mediate primordial conflicts, and open up the political terrain to democratic contestations for power. This agenda for strengthening civil society has been endorsed by practically all nations, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, donors and lenders alike.

The challenge at this historical conjuncture is for democratic forces in Africa to take advantage of the global goodwill and expand the frontiers and realities of democracy in the continent. At best the outside world can assist Africa in the process but cannot, and should not (as is currently the case), dictate the content and context of politics, the patterns of politics, the acceptability or otherwise of elections, and which leaders should be accepted or rejected. These have to be determined by the people based on the internal dynamics of political alignment and realignments.

## Security challenges

J 'KAYODE FAYEMI

AFRICA is at a crossroads today. The continent is demilitarising and embarking on democratic transitions on the one hand, but on the other, is becoming increasingly marginalised in the global economy, facing severe crises in state authority and caught up in spreading armed conflicts. Although the African state is not monolithic and experiences are far from uniform, it is arguable that certain salient features cohere in any attempt to understand and address the challenges facing the post-Cold War state in Africa at the dawn of the millennium.

To contextualise these features, it is important to understand the nature of the nation state in the post-Cold War era in order to draw up scenarios for the next century and examine the prospects of reconstituting the nation state.

Central to the evolution of the post-colonial nation state in Africa



is the impact of artificial borders on interstate and intra-ethnic relationships on the continent. Although cognisance must be taken of the pre-existing economic links, pre-colonial encounters and the complementarity of geographical regions, which served as the ultimate elixir for mutual interdependence among competing ethnic interests, it cannot be overemphasised that internal divisions also gave rise to centrifugal fissures primarily related to the divisions that predated colonialism, albeit exacerbated by external influence.

**T**he political decision to see nation states as extensions of ethnic and individual boundaries followed closely in the tradition of classical realists in western societies. This led to the creation of imagined nations in which individual security, ethnic contiguity and cultural forms in their variegated mosaic were seen as synonymous with national security, even as the sub-structural contradictions in these new states remained glaringly evident.

For a period – especially in the immediate post-independence era – the euphoria that accompanied freedom made it possible to paper over the cracks of ethnic nationalism by focusing on the bigger picture in which African countries were mere proxies in the superpower rivalry. Whereas the independence decade of the 1960s showed satisfactory incomes and overall development, the 1970s introduced stagnation as Africa was unable to respond to the changed global economic conditions of decreasing primary commodity prices and increasing oil prices.

By the mid-1980s, the region witnessed the unaccountability of structures which led to significant declines in growth and per capita income, the erosion of social infrastructure, increasing poverty and hun-

ger, and the rise of despotic regimes. With the collapse of the bipolar world and the loss of monopoly over violence by African states, some of the conflicts resurged from the post independence contradictions of the states, while others emerged out of the collapse of the dominant superpower politics of the Cold War era. This era guaranteed the minimum integrity of the state and the monopoly of coercive instruments by the ruling élite, which ensured that the directive principle of state policy was authoritarian rule. In the last decade, no fewer than 28 Sub-Saharan African states have been embroiled in one form of civil conflict or another, and several internal conflicts where interests external to Africa have retained considerable influence remain constant features of the crisis of the nation state.

**T**he above underscores the increasing illegitimacy of the African state, accentuated by the deepening chasm between urban and rural communities, a factor standing at the base of many of the internal conflicts now prevalent on the continent. Although the urban/rural divide has been a constant feature of Africa's post-independence political economy, the post-Cold War processes of globalisation and trade integration<sup>1</sup> have seriously deepened economic problems in new democracies, weakened the nation state and exacerbated the privatisation of war and the state as a result.

It would indeed appear that there is a direct correlation between the inability of the average African state to provide the basic means of livelihood for ordinary citizens and its resultant loss of the total monopoly over the means of coercion within

the territory it supposedly controls. Without a doubt, the capacity of governments to govern can make a crucial difference both to the trajectory of conflict and to its impact on equitable resource distribution.

**A**s Luckham, Ahmed and Muggah have shown most persuasively, 'The disappearance of governments in what has now become known as collapsed states is associated with acute physical insecurity for ordinary individuals and communities, leads to the loss of basic services like health and education, destroys physical and social capital and produces widespread poverty and immiseration. On the other hand, where an appearance of state structures still exists, predatory ruling groups may have their own interests in proliferating armed groups and perpetuating instability.'<sup>2</sup>

Although the jury is still out in purely academic circles about the winners and losers of the globalisation upsurge, the experience of millions of Africans in reality has already provided the answer. Clearly, poverty remains the greatest threat to democratic consolidation in Africa today and, at the broadest level, globalisation is resulting in deep polarisation between rich and poor throughout the continent. Whereas quantitative accounts of the problems do not tell the entire story, the statistics for the African continent paint a gory picture – especially in terms of the impact of conflict on poverty on the continent.

It is estimated that half of the African population will be poorer by 2000. Almost all African states experienced some form of armed conflict

1. See N van de Walle, 'Globalisation and African democracy', in R. Joseph (ed), *State, Conflict and Democracy in Africa*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder, 1999.

2. R. Luckham, I. Ahmad and R. Muggah, *The Impact of Conflict on Poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Background paper for World Bank poverty status assessment for Sub-Saharan Africa, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, May 1999.

in the 1990s. In 1998, there were no less than 11 major conflicts in Africa, putting at risk the lives and welfare of some eight million people, and giving the region a disproportionate share of refugees, an estimated eight million out of 22 million globally. Children were particularly vulnerable: two million were lost in conflicts; over four million were disabled; 12 million became homeless and one million were displaced. (UNHCR – The State of the World Refugees 1998). In West Africa alone, at least 10 of the 16 countries experienced some or other kind of political upheaval, a figure notably comparable to that relating to countries under military rule or just emerging from prolonged military rule.

**T**he above has implications for sustainable democracy. Leaving aside the critical conditions of poverty in which the continent has been plunged, the overriding majority of the African populace are completely detached from the democratisation process and there is little indication that their lot will be improved under *proforma* democratisation. The experience of Africa, a decade after the post-Cold War 'third wave' democratic dawn, underlines the enormity of the task of locating the democracy agenda within a development and security framework.

While significant strides have been made in certain areas, it may be misleading to speak of democratic governments, if by this is understood that the formal end of authoritarian structures also marks a definitive break with past patterns of rights abuses, conflict exacerbation by the state, and the militarism of decision-making processes. Given the authoritarian character of the democratisation processes in these countries, narrow forms of stability and security have now replaced erst-

while concerns about the nature of rule and the rights of citizens to choose their rulers.

**T**his is further complicated by the tendency of departing authoritarian regimes to bequeath their civilian successors with a hopeless economic situation, which serves to exacerbate the contradictions between the state apparatus and society, ultimately resulting in a campaign for the return of the strong men. The structural adjustment programmes undertaken by virtually every country on the continent is the best example of this phenomenon.

Structural adjustment programmes correlate to repression in its usual demand for devaluation, desubsidisation, denationalisation and deregulation, all of which are possible only in an atmosphere of the absolute suppression of citizens' rights. Promoted by the same international financial institutions that argue for 'good governance and democracy', there is little doubt now that these policies promoted internal social inequalities and, consequently, increased political tension leading to conflict and poverty. This served to consolidate instability and authoritarianism rather than democracy, since the political stability required for direct foreign investment makes the use of force commonplace, and militarisation inevitable.

In a serious way, this constitutes the greatest challenge to the future of the nation state. On the one hand, asking authoritarian governments to deepen democratic processes, while having little or no answers to their countries' economic and social problems, would only be seen as political suicide. On the other hand, advising those excluded from the political process to put their faith in 'electoral democracy' in a field stacked against them will only promote the efficacy

of the rule of the gun. The militarist option now prevalent in Africa must therefore be seen, in part, as the inevitable consequence of the acute nature of internal contradictions and the near total absence of any mediating mechanisms for managing conflict that can ensure enduring resolutions. This is the most significant challenge that scholars and policy-makers need to overcome in order to assist in reconstituting the state.

**O**ne of the most salient features of the post-Cold War era wars is their hitherto hidden, but ultimately virulent domestic dimensions. Yet, as internal as the new uncivil wars are, it must be recognised that they are more 'glocal' than 'local', as they involve a range of different actors: national, subnational and transnational interests. They have international and regional dimensions, and the dialectics of globalisation and the localisation of contemporary conflicts remain key factors in understanding the political and economic causes of conflict, the intertwined connections between warlords and mercenaries, between the plunderers of African mineral and natural wealth, small arms proliferators and drug dealers, and ultimately the current condition of the nation state.

Indeed, the nature and extent of this linkage go to the very root of understanding the privatisation of the nation state and its inability to organise and control state power. In its most worrying impact, the erosion of state power has resulted in the rise of shadow economies that have largely fed conflict in the region. It has also created a fractured state system in which existing basis of political cooperation among states can no longer be assumed, as states shift loyalties between subregional imperatives and personal projects.

Although war has become an extension of political discourse in closed societies, it does not always uproot the *status quo* or threaten the state machinery, except where used as a means to arrive at the negotiating table. Recent guerrilla activities have not always been conceived and are not always directed as extensions of political discourse, thus leading to a caricature of conflict management.<sup>3</sup> Stopgap measures like elections, power-sharing arrangements or national unity governments become ends in themselves, not means and processes of resolving the fundamental crisis of governance in society. The recent peace accord in Sierra Leone may be seen as an example of this. Since electoral compacts have proved inadequate conflict management tools in Africa, how then does the African state overcome the enormous challenge of reconstituting its leviathan politics?

In spite of the picture painted above, military disengagement from politics and a critical move away from military security as conceived in the narrow, realist definition of international politics are still the important first steps towards democratic reform, consensus-building and the depsychologising of the authoritarian mindset. The ultimate goal should, however, remain a comprehensive framework of security. To be sure, the available evidence confirms the view that the demilitarisation of politics has widened the space within which concrete democratic reform is possible and sustainable. Even so, a complete overhaul of politics from its military roots, especially in a body politic that has become so atomised, and in which the sym-

bols, values, and ethos of the military are replicated by large sections of the civil-society, still appears difficult to attain.<sup>4</sup>

Given the prevailing political culture bred by three decades of militarisation and authoritarian control, perhaps the greatest challenge is in dealing with the psychology of militarism and the aura of invincibility that this has created. As recently noted in a joint conference report by the Economic Community for Africa (ECA) and the Global Coalition for Africa (GCA), 'In some African countries, political transition has involved a reconfiguration of political, economic and military elites, rather than an opening up of the political system and broadening of participation.'<sup>5</sup> Indeed, this is more likely to be the case if the 'new democrats' come from a military background, as is largely the case in Africa where there are more 'shadow military states', rather than democratic countries.

The post-Cold War array of non-state actors who have set up rival factions to challenge the militarised state stem from this mindset. The same can be said of the upsurge in child soldiers who have exchanged their school pens and pencils for rifles and grenades, and university graduates who have dropped their diplomas for military commission. Traumatized by violence and prolonged existence under military and authoritarian structures, the tendency to have a low regard for civilians in societies where traditional

norms and the rule of law have little or no meaning is very high. Violence has therefore become the acceptable means of communication. A critical challenge in consolidating democracies and reinventing the state is thus the reclaiming of the militarised mind, which has been fed by a deep-seated feeling of social exclusion.

Since states are usually products of war and rampage, it might sound romantic to base the reconstruction of the nation state on the notion of reclaiming the militarised mind through the creation of structures that can mediate conflict and offer succour to belligerent parties. Perhaps, an explanation of this construction is necessary here. It is suggested that the military option now prevalent in several parts of the African continent is an inevitable consequence of the acute nature of internal contradictions and the almost total absence of democratic institutions that can assist in the management of deep rooted conflicts. To the extent that this is correct, it is arguable that the most urgent task is that of reconstituting the African state along equitable and just lines. At every level, the idea of constitutionalising politics that have largely functioned as 'virtual' democracies along multifaceted lines is taking shape.

From the constitutional conferences in Benin, Togo, Niger, Mali, Congo-Kinshasa in the early 1990s, to the process-based and people-driven constitution-making processes in South Africa, Uganda, Ethiopia and Eritrea, the post-Cold War decade has witnessed an upsurge in the demand for constitutionally based governance – governments that broadly reflect the will of the people in terms of process and outcome. Today, the struggle for constitutional reform in Kenya, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Swaziland and

3. C. Clapham (ed), *African Guerrillas*, James Currey & Indiana University Press, London, 1998. Also, see John Mackinlay, 'Warlords', in *RUSI Journal*, 1998.

4. J 'K. Fayemi, 'Civil-Military Relations and the Future of Democratic Consolidation in West Africa', *African Journal of Political Science* (AJPS, Special Issue on Security in Africa), 1998.

5. Economic Community of Africa and Global Coalition for Africa, *The role of the African military in political transition and economic development. co-chairpersons' summary*. Addis-Ababa, 8-9 May 1998, p. 1.

Lesotho, to mention but a few, underscores a paradigmatic shift from constitutionality to constitutionalism, a situation where constitutions are now seen as tools for building bridges between the state and civil society, a social compact based upon a foundation of consensus among the constituent elements within the polity and between them and the state.

What has to be emphasised in reconstituting African polities in the next millennium is the importance of an organic link between the constitution as a rule of law instrument, primarily concerned with restraining government excesses, and the constitution as a legitimisation of power structures and relations based on a broad social consensus in diverse societies. In short, the task today is largely between bridging the gap between 'juristic constitutionalism' and 'political and socio-economic constitutionalism' if the reconstituted state is to have meaning to its citizens.<sup>6</sup>

**A**lthough the above may provide the basis for facilitating consensus-building in a reconstituted state, it cannot succeed without the broadening of the current narrow conception of security. To achieve a measure of stability, African security and democracy must be seen beyond the state. It must also break out of its dominant, albeit narrow, technocratic and functionalist conception to embrace a human-centred, holistic approach to security.

'For most people today, a feeling of insecurity arises more from worries about the daily life than from the dread of a cataclysmic world event. Job security, income security,

health security, environmental security, security from crime, these are the emerging concerns of human security all over the world.'<sup>7</sup>

**T**o proffer permanent solutions that do not reignite war, a broader conception of security that does not limit it to narrowly defined military notions of security, currently predominant in security studies and practice, must be embraced. This broader conception must articulate security in a manner that the individual, the group and the state may relate to their fundamental objectives of promoting and ensuring the right to life and livelihood in a region where poverty remains the greatest threat to security and stability. Although the dangers that might also accompany too broad a conception of security which altogether dismisses the legitimate need for the military are recognised – and this is already evident in the *carte blanche* demand for the reduction of military expenditure in development circles – holistic security sector reform should recognise an objective need on the part of states and individuals to want to protect their own.

Acknowledging this fact should not be seen as a negation of the importance of a human-centred development and security framework. It might help, however, in capturing in precise terms the policy challenges posed for conflict transformation and regional security in terms of the tendencies and trajectories of conflict. It might also help to answer the challenges that have emerged:

- \* Under which circumstances, if any, is war necessary to remove bad governments?
- \* How is political cooperation built between and among states to make

peace support operations effective?

\* How can state-centric definitions of security be de-emphasised, and the role of civil society in peace-building be increased?

\* How is democratic control of the military built in states undergoing political transition or moving from war to peace – through parliamentary oversight, effective institutions of governance and genuine interaction between the military and the rest of society?

**U**ltimately, the solution to the crisis of the nation state might well be a supranational arrangement in which countries submit some sovereignty to the supranational entity. The security framework that eventually emerges out of this conception must be seen as a public good – the concern of all citizens – and states must be prepared to provide security on terms negotiated with the citizens. The best mechanisms within which success can be attained are through greater economic integration based on 'people-to-people' interaction and the free movement of goods, rather than through regional security and peacekeeping initiatives.

For the long-term stability of any democracy transiting from prolonged military/authoritarian rule, changes in the military, security and defence structures are imperative. They must comprehensively examine the challenges posed by these various aspects of the weakening nation state in the era of globalisation. Ultimately, holistic solutions to the root causes of conflict must be found by drawing the necessary linkages between underdevelopment, instability and the security logic in the region.<sup>8</sup>

Caught between the extremes of supranationalism as represented

6. J. 'K. Fayemi, Promoting a Culture of Constitutionalism and Democracy in Africa Paper prepared for the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative expert working group on principles and mechanisms of constitution-making in the Commonwealth, BurgerSpark, Pretoria, 16-18 August 1999.

7. UNDP, *Human Development Report*, 1994, p. 3.

8. See J. 'K. Fayemi and A.F. Musah (eds), *Mercenaries: An African Security Dilemma*, Pluto Press, London, 1999.

by globalisation, and the reactionary subnationalism that has been exacerbated by the politicisation of ethnicity, regionalism offers the best panacea for the weakened nation state in Africa. Indeed, it would appear that any prospect for demilitarisation and democratisation in Africa must build on the tender fabrics of regionalism if there is to be any chance of success. The work that the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have done in the last decade underscores the importance of strengthening regional frameworks as mechanisms for strengthening nation states.

**G**iven the declining external security threats and a need to curb the rising tide of internal strife, the promotion of peace building mechanisms within the global framework of preventive diplomacy would seem critical in the region. The last decade in Southern, East and West Africa has witnessed the strengthening of regional institutions, especially in terms of conflict management capacity. Yet, regional autonomy can be influenced by national and subnational factors. They are also susceptible to super-power influence and control, which may be ambivalent about the goals of development and democratic consolidation, especially if the latter does not offer the required stability for capitalist development. There is a sense in which external efforts like ACRI and RECAMP fall prey to this narrow conception.

Yet, in rethinking regionalism, it is necessary to go beyond the pro forma creation of peacekeeping forces that remain technicalities, existing only in form and content. For regionalism to be an effective antidote to globalisation and ethnocentrism, it must permeate the nation state in a

more deeply rooted manner. Otherwise, if the current challenges to the nation state in Africa posed by non-state actors are measures of what to expect in future, then the prospects for consolidating the democratisation projects are slim, if not non-existent. It is for this reason that a recognition of the necessity for a multidimensional understanding of security without a reconceptualisation of sovereignty will ultimately undermine the search for an holistic security agenda.

In arguing for a reconceptualisation of the sovereignty concept in the sub-region, which de-emphasises artificial colonial boundaries, the motive is not territorial revisionism. Instead, the territorial state is revisited where the artificial boundaries have formed the legitimising force for arrested development in several nation states that are just juridical entities, totally meaningless to its inhabitants. Translated to a sustainable security agenda, it is safe to argue in favour of a confinable regional security and development mechanism, one that is properly structured, rather than a victim of 'ad hocism' as was witnessed in ECOMOG.

**I**f a structured mechanism is available and deployable at a moment's notice, it should be possible to convince small states like Sierra Leone, Lesotho and Gambia that the protection of their territorial integrity does not necessarily depend on a standing army, if there is a standing peacekeeping arrangement to which they can contribute soldiers. A systemic change of the type that is suggested requires extensive work. SADC has already blazed the trail in this regard through its ISDSC and the EAC and ECOWAS have recently developed frameworks for the management of conflict in their respective regions.

In trying to resolve problems at the regional level, a key challenge is to contain the military threats within democratising polities in terms of the place of the military in a democracy, the mission of the military, the civilian oversight functions, ethnicity and minority questions in the military and related questions of a direct military nature as a means of eliminating militarism and enhancing the professionalism of the military.

**I**f militarisation is to become less significant, then the military mission needs to be redefined. Within the context of the identified challenges, the entrenchment of the African militaries in all aspects of civic and economic life makes their eventual permanent removal an area that will demand considerable skill. This will have to be done by assuaging fears about their future in a post-military dispensation and finding an appropriate role and mission for those left behind in the institution, in terms of maintaining their professional autonomy.

Equally important will be the need to develop a civilian, democratic defence policy expertise and create the necessary opportunities for networking and dialogue between military representatives and civil society. As much as possible, the military must be restricted to its traditional external combat role as a means of strengthening civil-military relations. If it must get involved in any internal security operations, then proper criteria must be drawn up for evaluating the involvement of armed forces in non-combat operations. At all times, the unifying theme in all of the political elite negotiations has always been the determination to assert civilian supremacy and oversight and the subordination of the military to objective civilian control. This ought to be extended to democratic control in

which citizens also make inputs in deciding the shape, form and character of their military in an accountable and transparent manner.

**P**rovided the overall case for regionalisation is acceptable to affected states, the other issue for consideration at the nation state level is the separation of operational and policy control over broad defence matters such as size, shape, organisation, equipment, weapon acquisition and pay/conditions in the services, on the one hand, and administrative control over the services, on the other. The point has been made earlier that the lack of any expertise on the part of elected civilian authorities has prevented effective oversight of the various arms of the armed forces.

Any redirection of the defence policy process will inevitably require a different kind of expertise, which must be a mixture of civilians and military professionals. To sustain this, there has to be a significant thawing process through changes in relationships between the military and civilian political élite, and a significant increase in contacts between opinion moulders and the outside world. The process of agreeing on an appropriate role for the military can only be successfully achieved in a climate of sustained dialogue.

Presently, contact is virtually non-existent, or just on a social basis and in an unstructured manner. In introducing civilian expertise, however, care must be taken not to substitute military incompetence in a political setting with civilian inexperience, nor should power be given to technocrats who are not wholly accountable to the electorate. If civilian control is to be democratic, it must empower those who have political platforms to lead the confidence-building relationship.

This is not to suggest that professional civilian expertise is unnecessary in these countries. In fact, a possibility worth exploring is the creation of a strategic cell that may serve in an advisory capacity between a civilian presidency and the military professionals. At all times, the military should not be left to conduct its affairs without 'interference', at least not in terms of broad policy formulation, but the political élite should leave the military alone in designing wholly operational matters in areas where the broad policy questions have been settled.

In ensuring civilian supremacy and a democratic pattern of civil military relations, the civilian leadership in a post-military state must help the military to define its role in a clear and precise manner. As much as possible, this must be restricted to its traditional external combat role as a means of strengthening civil-military relations. If it must get involved in any internal security operations, then proper criteria must be drawn up for evaluating the involvement of armed forces in non-combat operations.

**I**n suggesting the structural mechanisms for de-emphasising force in conflict management and outlining some of the challenges to the African state in the next millennium, the central thrust of the argument is that the weakening nation state must recognise the value of accommodating a high degree of autonomy and decentralisation if it is to remain a viable unit. Equally, the nation state must see the process of regionalisation, especially given Africa's recent experience, with a degree of enthusiasm without necessarily losing the symbolism of sovereignty.

The quality of political leadership will ultimately make a difference in straddling these difficult strands. The 'political' military has always

preyed on divisions among the civilian political élite; in several instances it has actively promoted these divisions in the ranks of political and civil society, only to use this as an excuse to intervene. This is why the clarity and quality of the post-military leadership will necessarily determine how these complex issues are resolved in a sustained framework.

**B**efore then, scholars of public policy on democratisation, demilitarisation and civil-military relations must address issues that are germane to the eventual consolidation of democracy and peace building by recognising that the process is a marathon, not a dash. The major task is the search for stable and sustainable civil-military relations and democratic consolidation in Africa. If this search is holistic, it may not necessarily result in cost-savings in military expenditure, since the bulk is spent on personnel and related areas in Africa, rather than on capital goods like weapons. Even if personnel are downsized, their resettlement and reintegration into civil society also cost money, and could be more expensive than retention, in some cases.

Neither will the search automatically lead to the elimination of standing armies – the ultimate peace dividend expected in the post-Cold War era – especially where there are no guarantees that the territorial integrity of the states in question can be protected by other mechanisms. The search is likely to assist in creating more democratic and accountable militaries whose needs are subjected to a wide and varied debate both within the military and the larger civil society with a view to enhance both individual and collective security and development. The inclusive nature of the process is bound to affect the outcome.

# Do South Africans value democracy?

STEVEN FRIEDMAN

FOR democracy, these are perhaps the best and worst of times. The best, because formal political freedom is more pervasive than ever. The worst, because democracy's relative triumph has been won at the cost of its 'hollowing out', both practically and in the value which is placed upon it.

New democracies seem largely unable to translate voter preferences into policy.<sup>1</sup> This article will, however, focus not on this but on the degree to which democracy has, among elites rather than citizens, come to be seen less as a value in itself, a source of participation and liberty, and more as an instrument of economic growth and administrative effectiveness.

It will take as a case study a country whose elite would, given its history, be expected to take democracy as a value more seriously than most: South Africa. It will, however, argue that, in contrast to citizens, its elite is adopting a particularly instrumental view of the society's new-found right to govern itself. And it will illustrate this through an analysis of the country's second universal franchise election in June 1999.

Elections are not solely a means of counting public preferences. Many

citizens may see an election as the only occasion on which their choices are stamped on the political process. Voting is an act of giving voice and thus of asserting the political self, of expressing identity and autonomy; one analysis suggests it is also a crucial act of commitment to democracy and its values, capable of developing 'positive, democratic character traits such as community mindedness, political self-competence, and satisfaction with decision-making structures, institutions and outputs.'<sup>2</sup> That citizens should be able to exercise their vote, and derive satisfaction from doing so, is more important to democracy's health than for whom they elect.

This point is particularly important to South Africa's new democracy for, as citizen behaviour in 1994 showed,<sup>3</sup> the vote takes on added meaning in a society in which a racial minority monopolised it. Just as the denial of the vote was a symbol of exclusion, its achievement became a sign of restored dignity.

This may seem obvious. But, during the negotiations which produced the 1993 settlement ending

1. See Steven Friedman, *Democracy, Inequality and the Reconstitution of Politics*, Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars, Washington DC, 2000 (forthcoming)

2. S. Finkel, 'The Effects of Participation on Political Efficacy and Political Support: Evidence from a West German Panel', *Journal of Politics* 49 (2), 1987.

3. Steven Friedman and Louise Stack, 'The Magic Moment', in Steven Friedman and

apartheid, negotiators representing the African National Congress, the present government which led the fight against racial domination, insisted that only special measures would induce many black South Africans to vote because the violence of the past few years had made them fearful of the risk.<sup>4</sup>

**U**nderstanding voting in this way – as an instrumental exercise in which citizens weigh the uncertain benefits of casting a ballot against the sure cost of doing so – is a hallowed tenet of rational choice theory<sup>5</sup> which has failed repeatedly to explain actual behaviour.<sup>6</sup> As later events showed, its application in South Africa borders on the absurd.

This is so not only because the memory of a racial franchise is a spur to voter enthusiasm. The ANC's dominance at the polls, and the consequent perception that the outcome of elections is certain, would make voting irrational were it not spurred by factors other than cost-benefit calculations. Prime among these is identity.<sup>7</sup> South African parties are defined by, and draw their support from, identities – race, language and religion primary among them. Casting a ballot is primarily not an instrumental calculation but an expression of who a citizen is. And people will go to great lengths to express who they are.

Doreen Atkinson (eds), *The Small Miracle: South Africa's Negotiated Settlement*, Ravan Books, Johannesburg, 1995.

4. Claire Robertson, 'Contesting the Contest: Negotiating the Electoral Machinery', in Friedman and Atkinson, *ibid*

5. Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, Harper and Row, New York, 1957.

6. Donald Green and Ian Shapiro, *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1996.

7. Steven Friedman, 'Agreeing to Differ: African Democracy – Its Obstacles and Pitfalls', *Social Research* 66(3), Fall 1999.

In principle, South Africans' enthusiasm for voting gives it an important resource not always available to embryonic democratic systems – a degree of citizen commitment to democracy.

And, while some of the points made here about the first election may seem obvious, they apply equally as much to the second. If, for some commentators, the second elections are less important than founding ballots, this is not necessarily the perception of African citizens: a survey of 15 African second elections reveals that almost half recorded higher voter turnout than the founding election,<sup>8</sup> confirming that citizens' participatory impulses do not disappear when the first election ends.

This background provides us a prism through which to view the 1999 election and the degree to which it provided a vehicle for, or obstacle to, citizen support for democracy as a value.

**T**he framing of the electoral rules and conduct of the campaign reveal that the elite's instrumental perception of the purpose of elections, as well as of citizens' propensity to vote – have not changed fundamentally since 1993.

On the first score, the ANC concluded that preventing electoral fraud by insisting that voters could only cast a ballot if they acquired an identity document which contained an electronic bar-code outweighed extending the franchise to as many eligible adults as possible, since a significant section of the population lacked the documents and were unwilling or unable to jump through the bureaucratic hoops required to obtain them.

8 Michael Bratton, 'A First Look at Second Elections in Africa', *Transformation to a Successful Democracy*, Institute for Federal Democracy, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Durban, December 1998.

There is no firm evidence for the claim of white-led opposition parties that the identity document stipulation disadvantaged their voters disproportionately; a study found that several hundred thousand voters in ANC strongholds also lacked the required ID. Rather, the choice appears to have been underpinned by the assumption that the chief purpose of the election was to produce a technically unassailable result and that this merited curtailing the number of adults who would enjoy the democratic opportunity which voting provides.

**A** similar lack of enthusiasm for extending participation as widely as possible is suggested by the attitude to eligibility of the Independent Electoral Commission which was responsible for administering the poll. It adopted a US-style approach which placed the burden of enrolling as a voter on the citizen. In the US, registration criteria are arguably as responsible for low voter turnout as indifference or the instrumental calculations of rational choice theory.<sup>9</sup> It might be argued that, because voting is an act of democratic identification, the democratic state, if it wishes to ensure its health, has a core responsibility to ensure that this opportunity is available to all who wish to take advantage of it.<sup>10</sup>

But if citizens are enthusiastic about voting, will they not be willing to register? If queues at official offices are a guide, many were prepared to do just that. But this implies that all citizens possess the capacity to take advantage of these opportunities.

9. Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, *Why Americans Don't Vote*, Pantheon, New York, 1988.

10 Graeme Gotz Buying, in *Staying Out: The Politics of Registration for South Africa's First Democratic Local Government Elections*, Centre for Policy Studies, Johannesburg, October 1995



While officialdom did make some effort to lengthen office hours to allow citizens to obtain the required ID, it is unlikely that everyone who needed these documents was able to access them. And officials do not seem to have found a way of conveying information on registration to many citizens – a survey found that up to 45% of eligible adults who did not register believed they were still entitled to vote.

**N**or did the IEC do all it could to expand the corps of registered voters, even within its own rules. Much of its activities were based on the assumption that it was voters' responsibility to approach it for the vote, not its duty to seek voters out. The result was registration of some 75%, according to the IEC, but which may have been as low as 70%.<sup>11</sup> So almost a-third of the adult population may have been deprived of their right to vote. Since even the most pessimistic survey on voting intentions found that some 75% planned to vote,<sup>12</sup> at least 5% of citizens who wished to exercise the franchise may have been unable to do so.

This level of exclusion is not nearly high enough to question the legitimacy of the election. Contrary to the apparent calculations of the politicians and the IEC, the real loss lay in the denial of democratic participation and the implied assumption that participation is less of a value than factors such as cost or administrative neatness.

11 Shaun Mackay, 'IEC's Sleight of Hand is Not in Electorate's Long-Term Interest', *Synopsis*, Centre for Policy Studies 3(1), March 1999.

12. The two most oft-cited polls found 83% expressing a voting intention. Rod Alence and Michael O'Donovan, *If South Africa's Second Democratic Election Had Been Held in March 1999: A Simulation of Participation and Party Support Patterns*, mimeo, Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria, 1999, p. 7.

**T**he elite's understanding of motives for participation was suggested by the election's central issue: whether the ANC would win two-thirds of the vote, enabling it to change the constitution. While white-led opposition parties used this prospect to mobilise their voters, the ANC started the ball rolling by conjuring up images of the liberatory effects of the magic number.<sup>13</sup>

But why did it and the opposition use the size of the majority as a theme since, during the campaign, the ANC showed little interest in constitutional change? Both believed that since the election winner was not in doubt, only focusing on the size of the majority would get out its vote. As part confirmation, a senior ANC official exhorted researchers not to publish an analysis which indicated that it would fare better than was then predicted because 'we will then not be able to motivate our people.'<sup>14</sup> So the two-thirds debate was the product of a community of interest between governing party and opposition in manufacturing an issue which would encourage voters who firmly expected their party to lose or win to turn up at the polls.

This suggests a common perception that, at least to a degree, the rational choice theory of voter behaviour was accurate. By setting a much higher threshold for 'deciding' the election – two-thirds rather than 50% – the parties sought to increase the degree to which voters perceived a concrete benefit from voting so that they would be more willing to incur its costs.

But is this understanding of South African voters as people who weigh their decision on whether or not to vote on utility-maximising criteria

13 Centre for Policy Studies/National Business Initiative, *Quarterly Trends*, April 1998.

14. The exchange occurred at a seminar in Bonn, April 1998.

valid? There is anecdotal evidence of voters who did register and vote because they wished to affect the 'two-thirds' result but it is hardly enough to support or refute the argument. We do, however, have a test of the degree to which the perceived ability to influence the result determined propensity to vote – the provincial percentage polls. If voters are more likely to vote if they believe their choice will determine the result, we would expect higher polls in provinces where the outcome of the contest was in doubt. But there was little difference between provincial percentage polls; the highest were recorded in provinces where the victory margin was most lopsided, the lowest in a closely fought province.

The test is hardly definitive. Voters may not care whether their ballot influences provincial outcomes if they worry only about the national result, and rational choice theorists could protest, with justification, that it is irrelevant to the theory.<sup>15</sup> But our purpose is to test the claim that South Africans vote on instrumental criteria: the only data available from the 1999 poll suggests that they do not, and that citizens' voting behaviour is influenced far more by democratic commitment and enthusiasm than the elites allow.

**G**iven the analysis sketched thus far, it is no surprise that elite assumptions prior to both elections assumed a citizenry far less attuned to democracy's benefits than their betters in the media, politics, academe and the NGO movement.

This has many symptoms, of which enthusiasm for 'voter education' is an example. The assumption that voters need to be 'educated' imp-

15 The theory in its 'pure' form insists that no one will vote unless they believe that their ballot alone will be decisive. While this per-

lies that they are unable to cast a ballot without aid, which was refuted by behaviour in both elections, or are unable to discern their interests without help, which has also been empirically refuted.<sup>16</sup>

**A**nother is the claim that voters are inherently apathetic. This takes different forms, depending on whether voters are in the racial minority or majority. For the former, 'apathy' is said to stem from disenchantment with majority rule,<sup>17</sup> for the latter from reaction to inadequate government delivery of public goods, a claim which appears to lack any evidence at all. The turnout on election day, 1999, would appear to contradict both claims. The official percentage poll was 89% and there is no evidence that participation among racial minorities was lower: on the contrary, Indian voters who in survey evidence are said to feel most alienated by the post-apartheid polity, are said to have turned out in particularly large numbers.<sup>18</sup> This does not mean that these citizens are *not* disenchanting; merely that, if they are, they choose to express their grievance at the polls.

It is also worth mentioning that, while the inconvenience to which voters were subjected in 1999 rarely paralleled the 1994 experience, there were polling stations in which voters were subject to substantial discomfort. And, even at stations which

ception was more likely in 'close' provinces, the difference in perceived utility, given that even in close elections it may not be rational to assume that one's vote will be decisive, may not have been enough to influence behaviour.

16. Friedman and Stack, op cit.; Craig Charney, *Voices of a New Democracy: African Expectations in the New South Africa*, Centre for Policy Studies, Johannesburg, 1995

17. See *Rapport* survey reported in Centre for Policy Studies/National Business Initiative, *Quarterly Trends*, April 1998

18. SA Broadcasting Corporation, *Election Special* 2/6/99.

experienced less obvious logistical problems, the queues were often long enough to persuade anyone in them whose democratic commitment was tenuous, to abandon their quest.

Something is also worth saying about the ethos at polling stations. As in 1994, the experience of voting appeared to instil a sense of *camaraderie* and mutual regard, expressed in some cases in acts of generosity not always evident between elections. Despite a bad-tempered and sometimes violent campaign, polling day violence was largely absent. Many citizens may derive sufficient satisfaction from voting and enough of a sense of identification with the society to induce an unusually high level of 'civic' behaviour.<sup>19</sup>

**T**he levels of participation may, therefore, confirm that the degree of citizen commitment to democracy may be much higher than presumed by elites. But it may also say something important about the preconditions for effective governance.

South Africa is often portrayed as an unruly society in which citizens resist meeting their side of the 'social contract' with the democratic state. There is much evidence to support this, such as high crime and poor payment levels for public services. But the election invites reassessment of the assumption that South Africans are beyond the reach of the state unless it uses force or better administration to 'cage' them.<sup>20</sup> A significant minority were first prepared to stand at least twice in lengthy queues at government

19. Understood in the sense it is used by Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1994, as an indicator of those attitudes of reciprocity and public education which are, in this view, at the core of a democratic culture.

20. This term is used by Michael Mann, *States, War and Capitalism*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1988,

offices to claim their ID books and thus the right to vote. A majority then stood in queues, first to register, then to vote. A society in which many people are prepared to comply with onerous official requirements to claim a civic right does not seem inherently ungovernable.

This does not mean that the problem of creating a sense of civic obligation is illusory. It is one thing to submit to public authority to claim a right which bestows a sense of efficacy and opportunity to express one's identity; another to do the same for a more indirect public benefit with more obvious personal cost, such as paying electricity bills to ensure that the service is continued. But it may mean that the blocks of effective state-building are more available than many analyses assume.

Of course, the percentage poll reflects only those who registered. But the evidence suggests that the number of citizens willing to participate exceeded those able to do so. And again, that some two-thirds of the citizenry was willing to wend its way through a bureaucratic maze to vote suggests a significant 'critical mass' available for a state-building project.

That said, the fact that up to a third of citizens may not have voted and that the ANC's 66% share of the vote may translate into the express support of little over 40% of adults, holds as many lessons as the democratic enthusiasm noted here.

**I**f citizens are not moved to vote primarily by interest calculations, the tasks facing democratic government may be different to those assumed by many in South Africa's elite.

The dominant view is an ideology of delivery which holds that, given the apartheid legacy of mate-

to describe the process by which the state brings society within its orbit.

rial inequality, citizens can only be induced to endorse democratic institutions by 'delivery' of goods and services. By implication, if democratic intangibles such as the right to vigorous representation must be compromised in the process, the gains in heightened citizen confidence will far outweigh any democratic losses. There are strong elements of instrumentality in this assumption; citizens are believed to see democracy as a source of material benefit, not self-expression.

**T**he implied claim that there is a 'trade-off' between material improvement and democratic quality is dubious, given data from Southern countries indicating that democracy is not only compatible with growth and poverty reduction, but may be indispensable to both.<sup>21</sup> But it also misreads South Africa's citizenry and, therefore, its preconditions for democratic viability. A society in which most citizens are inclined to participate in democratic politics in part because they see it as an expression of their identity, is one in which the task of 'winning society for democracy' may be less onerous than implied, and one in which material delivery will not be enough.

The claim that South African political affiliations are shaped by identities is threatening to many politicians and intellectuals because it implies voter 'irrationality'; the claim that the black majority is incapable of making rational political choices underpins racist ideology. This may explain why elite perceptions of the electorate constantly resort to instrumental criteria: racism's opponents have a deep need to demonstrate that

South African voters are 'normal' utility maximising citizens.

**T**he response is understandable but flawed since it assumes that there is something 'normal' about the citizen who votes his or her interests rather than identity – that the calculations of rational choice theory are indeed a superior form of rationality.

But the utility maximising voter is itself an ideological creation. Not only do intangibles such as democratic commitment influence voter behaviour in all democracies: why else would people regularly vote for candidates or parties which have no hope of winning? But identities are important to choices in even the most seemingly instrumental democracy. In Britain, does the fact that some regions returned Labour candidates, others Tories, through a century mean that the majority make the same interest calculations every time or that their choice has something to do with their identity? And is being a US conservative or liberal purely an interest calculation or might it have something to do with who people think they are? And what of the historical importance of religion in voter choices in countries such as Holland? The Northern examples are selected to show that, even in democracies assumed to be 'normal' because elections are shaped by voters' interest calculations, identity is important.

The importance of identity creates an opportunity for it means that the electorate is willing to see democracy, at least in part, as a 'deliverer' of intangibles such as self-expression rather than as purely a source of material benefit. In societies such as South Africa, that suggests a strategy for democratic strengthening very different to that which now dominates.

If most South African voters care as much about intangibles – of which

identity is only part of a wider value placed on being heard – the challenge lies not in 'delivering' at the possible expense of self-expression, but in deepening and broadening the latter by strengthening participation and solidifying the relationship between legislators and citizens. It also, in the interests of economic growth and poverty reduction as well as democratic strengthening, requires a stress on difference as an asset rather than a liability, for only this can accommodate differing identities in a common political space.

**D**espite the electoral enthusiasm described here, the task of encouraging citizens into democracy remains important and this too is a powerful argument against one aspect of the ideology of delivery. A claimed message of the election is that citizens overwhelmingly conferred a mandate on the ANC to implement its agenda. Respect for difference may then appear unnecessary, since those who are different comprise at most a third of adults. But if those who explicitly endorsed the ANC at the polls are less than half the electorate, then most of the citizenry is still to endorse the government's programme. This implies that extending the reach of the democratic state remains as, if not more, urgent than material 'delivery'.

Democratic prospects will depend not primarily on improved public administration and enhanced 'delivery', but chiefly on the degree to which the necessary fight against poverty and inherited inequalities is pursued in ways which broaden and deepen the channels for democratic self-expression of all South Africa's identities – in a manner which recognises that, even in post-apartheid South Africa, democratic intangibles matter to citizens as much as material improvements.

21. Dani Rodrik, *The New Global Economy and Developing Countries: Making Openness Work*, Overseas Development Council, Washington DC, 1999

# The politics of stable civil-military relations

PITA OGABA AGBESE

DECADES of military rule in Nigeria have created a legacy of corruption, lawlessness, ethnic animosities, mass poverty and communal violence. Tackled individually, each of these legacies can sap the energies of any serious administration. In combination, they constitute monumental challenges.

From the very inception of the new civilian administration in May 1999, it became apparent that the it considered the re-establishment of stable civil-military relations as its highest priority. Thus, virtually only a few hours after he was sworn-in as president of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo appointed new military service chiefs and announced the retirement of 93 senior military and police officers. In addition, he appointed Theophilus Yakubu Danjuma, a well-respected retired general, as minister of defence. These actions by the president underscored the belief that political stability in Nigeria was possible only through a fundamental reform of the country's armed forces. As Atiku Abubakar, the vice president, noted, the military constitutes a 'big problem [that] the present government plans to sanitize.'<sup>1</sup>

We argue in this paper that the quick response of President Obasanjo to the military issue reflects his administration's belief that the success of the democratic transition exercise depends on devising strategies that would ensure the military's permanent subordination to civil authority. Our argument is anchored on the premise that Obasanjo's election as president in February 1999 has opened new vistas for civil-military relations in Nigeria. The argument will also be made against the backdrop that reforming the Nigerian military is a major challenge for the new administration.

The article has a two-fold objective: First, it reviews the state of civil military relations in contemporary Nigeria, more specifically the pernicious effect of military rule on civil military relations. Second, it analyzes the strategies adopted by the new administration to address the military question, in particular the various steps taken so far by the administration to reduce the military's economic and political power.

Nigeria's forceful condemnation of the recent military coup in Pakistan and its decision to suspend military relations with that country demonstrate the degree of fear and

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1. *Vanguard*, Wednesday, 29 September 1999.

apprehension which the coup generated among the country's new civilian leadership.<sup>2</sup> Nigeria was alarmed at the Pakistani coup because of a feeling that it might embolden elements of the nation's military to attempt to unseat the Obasanjo-led government. The fear generated among Nigerian leaders by the coup also demonstrates the state of unease between the military and the new administration. Even though President Obasanjo's first actions on coming to power were directed at addressing the military question, the change of government in Pakistan vividly revealed to the Nigerian leadership the imperative of resolving the military question as urgently as possible.

**D**espite the formal withdrawal of the armed forces from politics, the state of civil-military relations in Nigeria remains abysmal. Decades of military rule with the associated high-level corruption, gross mismanagement, non-accountability, human rights abuses and outright criminality have discredited the military as an institution. Sheer intimidation, willful attacks on civilians, the use of soldiers to settle personal scores, the participation of soldiers in criminal activities, including armed robbery and the setting up of illegal toll-roads to extort money from motorists, and military officers' blatant private expropriation of public resources have contributed to the low reputation which the armed forces currently enjoy. In particular, high-level corruption that typified the last two military governments has totally discredited the military in the eyes of many Nigerians.

Despite the open disdain for the armed forces, decades of military

rule in Nigeria have made the military and military officers (including retired officers) formidable political players. For instance, in the transition programme that brought Obasanjo to power, several retired officers including Obasanjo himself were elected to various political posts. The continued importance of the military in Nigeria's political equation can also be gauged by the fact that the Ministry of Defence received the largest budgetary allocation of 17.9 billion naira in the supplementary budget for the second half of the 1999 fiscal year.<sup>3</sup>

**T**he level of corruption and brazen criminality of the armed forces has a twist of irony because when junior officers of the Nigerian Army under the leadership of Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu toppled the Abubakar Tafawa Balewa-led federal government in January 1966, they announced that their objective in coming to power was to end corruption, indiscipline, political violence, disunity and maladministration.<sup>4</sup> Nzeogwu also promised that military rule would be brief. He claimed that he was not interested in governing Nigeria. Instead, that as disciplined and patriotic officers, he and his co-conspirators intended to handpick 'civilians of proven honesty and efficiency' to govern the country. Nzeogwu assured Nigerians that once the right politicians had been selected, military officers would merely stand guard with their 'fingers on the trigger' to ensure that the new crop of rulers did not engage in the same nefarious activities that had allegedly led to the overthrow of the Balewa government.

Nzeogwu and other subsequent coup plotters in Nigeria believed that the military was more disciplined

and less prone to corruption than the civilian politicians. Indeed, the nefarious activities of civilian politicians led some Nigerians to crave military intervention. As *West Africa* has aptly observed:

Military rule used to be popular in Nigeria. Indeed, it is common knowledge that the military only ever intervened after pleas from disgruntled sections of the civilian population. These days, however, military rule has lost its appeal not only in Nigeria but beyond. After the transition in 1998, it can only be in the interest of Nigeria if its military establishment bears this in mind always, so that, in the unlikely event of civilians coming back to plead for intervention, the former will be mentally prepared to refuse. After all the mishaps of the recent and distant past, this is the only safe route for the Nigerian ship of state.<sup>5</sup>

**T**o be sure, the military's first incursion into politics was helped by factors such as the weaknesses of civil society, lack of elite compacts on politics and the political process, the gross failures of civilian governance, distortions of the political economy, weak societal institutions, and the intense struggles for political power by civilian political elites.<sup>6</sup> Thus, like Nzeogwu, other Nigerian coup plotters too argued that their mission in seizing power was to restore the economy, clean the Aegean stable of corruption and abuse of power, democratize Nigeria and then retreat to the barracks. Yet, 30 years and seven different military regimes after

5. 'Democracy Beckons in Nigeria', *West Africa*, 29 July-4 August 1996, p. 1168.

6. For a scholarly analyses of military coups in Nigeria, see Toyin Falola and Julius Ihonvbere, *The Rise and Fall of Nigeria's Second Republic, 1979-84*, Zed Books, London, 1985. For the soldiers' own rationale for coups in Nigeria, see Ben Gbulie, *Nigeria's Five Majors: Coup d'état of 15th January 1966 First Inside Account*, Africana Educational Publishers, Onitsha, 1981, Adewale Ademoyega, *Why We Struck: The Story of the First Nigerian Coup*, Evans Brothers, Ibadan, 1981, David Akpode Ejoor, *Reminiscences*, Malthouse Press, Lagos, 1989; Joe Garba, *Revolution in Nigeria: Another View*, Africa Books Ltd, London, 1982.

2. In addition to official statements against the coup, the Senate passed a resolution condemning it.

3. See *Vanguard*, Friday, 3 September 1999.

4. See *The Nigerian Tribune*, 2 July 1967.

Nzeogwu's coup, corruption is still a major feature of Nigerian public and private life.

**M**oreover, military rule was not brief. On the contrary, from 1966 to 1979, Nigeria was ruled by various military regimes. After a four year hiatus, the military returned to power in 1983. Thus, rather than merely handpicking civilian rulers to govern the country as Nzeogwu had promised, the military directly ruled Nigeria and for decades dominated state and society. Not only did military officers rule Nigeria for 28 out of the last 33 years, the country was subjected to a spate of coups and counter-coups since the first one.

As Julius Ihonvbere has correctly noted, 'Military coups have been part of Nigeria's political equation since the first (coup) in January 1966.'<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Attahiru Jega notes that, 'Nigeria's political history over the last three decades has become essentially that of prolonged military rule.'<sup>8</sup> Jega also argues that the frequent intervention of the military in the political process in Nigeria has entrenched and nurtured a 'coup making culture.'<sup>9</sup>

The failure of military rulers to wipe out corruption, indiscipline and misgovernance as they had frequently promised is a serious indictment of military rule. The military's numerous broken promises to Nigerians constituted a betrayal of military honour and duty. Military intervention in politics

itself manifests a high degree of lawlessness that has corroded the soul of Nigeria for the past three decades.

A second imperative for instituting measures to permanently bar the military from political intervention stems from the recognition that military rule poses a serious threat to the armed forces as an institution. The naked quest for political power among military officers has decimated the ranks of the military. Coups, coup attempts and even 'rumours' of coups have led to many military officers being executed. In addition, coups have destroyed the hierarchical chain of command in the Nigerian armed forces. Junior officers who succeeded in staging coups automatically promoted themselves over and above their erstwhile superior officers. This practice not only damaged the chain of command, it created a climate of mutual suspicion and recrimination detrimental to professionalism and military discipline.

**M**ilitary rule was also detrimental to the corporate existence of the military because it created two sets of military personnel: Officers who held political appointments and used their political positions as a route to enrich themselves, and others who continued to perform purely military duties. Without access to state power, this latter category did not get much opportunity to enrich themselves. This too bred deep resentment with dire consequences for military discipline. Thus, military rule created wide polarization and deep factionalization in the Nigerian armed forces. Senior officers constantly dread junior officers for fear that the latter may one day carry out their long-expected bloody coup. On their part, junior officers live in constant fear of their senior officers. They are apprehensive that they could become victims

of witch-hunts designed to wipe out potential coup plotters.

**S**everal years ago, General Ibrahim Babangida, the then head of state, raised an alarm over this state of affairs in the armed forces. He reminded his fellow officers of the 'good old days' when officers 'really cared for their men... the days of dedicated and committed senior officers who saw their primary duty as one of producing honorable, disciplined, healthy and loyal officers and men.'<sup>10</sup> Babangida lamented that the 'good old days' had disappeared from military barracks. He noted that instead of commonalities of interests between senior and junior officers, a wide 'communication gap' had developed between the two sets of officers. Babangida also pointed out that:

There seems to be a lack of commitment on the part of some of our officers and NCOs to the military profession... Many of us as senior officers hardly relate to our juniors. Often the gap between senior and junior officers has widened, thus making dangerously manifest generational cleavages. I expect that the military involvement in politics has had a hand in this. Also I think that the threat of witch-hunting under the guise of plotting to overthrow government is responsible for this.<sup>11</sup>

Brigadier General David Mark has described the military as a 'group of disorganized cowboys.'<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Julius Ihonvbere observed that the advent of military rule in Nigeria has created a situation in which military officers are more or less organized into a variety of factions around the power and authority of retired and serving generals. Such generals as Yar'Adua, Babangida, Akınrinade, Obasanjo, Ukiwe, Bali, Idiagbon, Gowon, Buhari, Danjuma, Dogon-

7. Julius O. Ihonvbere, 'Are Things Falling Apart? The Military and the Crisis of Democratization in Nigeria', *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 34 (2), 1996, p. 193.

8. Attahiru M. Jega, *The Military and Democratization in Nigeria*. Paper presented at the conference on Dilemmas of Democratization in Nigeria, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 10-12 November 1995, p. 1.

9. Attahiru Jega, *ibid.*, p. 9.

10. Ibrahim Babangida, *For Their Tomorrow, We Gave Our Today: Selected Speeches of IBB*, Volume II, Safari Books, Ibadan, 1991, p. 186.

11. *Ibid.*

12. 'Hope Betrayed', Interview with Brigadier David Mark, *Newswatch*, 11 April 1994.

yaro, though retired, continue to have their 'boys' within the army who protect their interests and take directions from them.

**T**o be sure, these cliques are not permanent and when an officer's expectations are not met he can easily switch allegiance to another retired or serving general. Of course, serving generals like Sanjivan Abacha and Oladipo Diya also have their 'boys' who look after them, 'watch their backs', spy on other officers and listen to the rank and file. What this means is that the organization of interests and loyalty around military generals complicates the existing problems of ethnic, regional and religious factionalization and suspicion which already exist within the army.<sup>13</sup>

An editorial in *The Post Express* echoes the same concern about the invidious nature of factionalism in the armed forces:

It was not only civil society that had suffered in the hands of our military. The military institution itself [even before the death of Abacha] had reached the very depths of loss of esteem. Even more devastating is the effect of prolonged political involvement on the institutional integrity of the military itself. *Esprit de corps*, that indivisible bond of respect for each other and for professional hierarchy that binds modern warriors (serving and retired) to each other and to the profession had long vanished. Political factions emerged in the barracks with their own adherents and detractors alike. Mutual suspicion among factions, crude materialism and corruption among the officer corps and rank and file alike have become the bane of our military.<sup>14</sup>

The failure of high-ranking officers to look after their men seemed to have compelled some soldiers to take

up armed robbery. Allegations abound about military personnel selling their guns to hoodlums and armed robbers. Other soldiers are hired by landlords to collect rent from recalcitrant tenants. In yet other cases, soldiers set up illegal toll-booths on highways to extort money and other valuable goods from motorists. Illegal activities such as these further discredit the military in the eyes of many Nigerians. Consequently, many soldiers get demoralized and lose confidence in the military as a profession.

One of the most pernicious legacies of military rule in Nigeria is the culture of violence that it has created. Military rule placed a premium on force and violence. Dialogue, bargaining, compromise, all essential elements of effective governing style were de-emphasized by military officers. Instead, Nigerians were compelled to submit to senseless military commands. Even speech patterns in Nigeria seem to have been militarized. Rude, violent and foul language now characterize the mode of public discourse in the country. Military rule also exacerbated inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic conflicts in many parts of the country.

**I**n addition, it created a criminalized economy. Virtually all segments of the national economy were rendered comatose by corruption, shady deals and gross fraudulent practices. Fraud and corruption escalated as a direct result of state policy and lack of accountability. Military rule legitimized the notion that the essence of political power lies in its use as an instrument for the private plunder of public resources.<sup>15</sup> General Abacha alone has been accused of stealing billions of dollars

15. For a detailed analysis of maladministration by state military governors, see the cover story, 'Farewell to Failure', *Tell*, September 1996, pp. 10-16. While many of the

during the five years when he ruled the country.

The ceaseless use of state power for private capital accumulation by military officers and their civilian supporters has generated deep political apathy and a cynical attitude to public affairs by the vast majority of Nigerians. As Obaro Ikime, an astute chronicler of Nigerian history, has observed:

Nearly thirty years of rule by the military have turned the Nigerian Army into something of an ogre. Successive military regimes have displayed increasing autocracy and mindless acquisition of wealth at the expense of the national treasury. Not even the army would now dare to suggest that military rule is corrective. Our experience is that military rule has been extremely corrosive. And it has corroded the very soul and substance of the nation.<sup>16</sup>

**I**n a book written on the eve of the 1979 transition from military rule, a Nigerian political scientist, Oyeleye Oyediran, asked how long the succeeding civilian rule would last. Four years later, his question was unequivocally answered when the military overthrew the then civilian government headed by President Shehu Shagari. Similarly, Claude E. Welch Jr, in a recent article on the propensity for military intervention in Nigerian politics noted that, 'Military profession of neutrality notwithstanding, the idea that the Nigerian armed forces will assume a non-interventionist role for the foreseeable future flies in the face of the facts of the situation.'<sup>17</sup> Oyediran and Welch's pessimism reflects a widely-held belief that Nigeria has not yet seen the last of military governance. This widespread belief

state governors failed to pay the salaries of civil servants, they awarded multimillion naira contracts for dubious projects.

16. Obaro Ikime, 'Professionalize the Army', *The Post Express*, 22 June 1998.

17. Claude E. Welch, Jr, 'Civil-Military Agonies in Nigeria: Pains of an Unaccomplished Transition', *Armed Forces and Society* 21(4) Summer 1995, p. 610.

13. Julius O. Ihonvbere, 'The Military and Nigerian Society: The Abacha Coup and the Crisis of Democratization in Nigeria', in Eboe Hutchful and Abdoulaye Bathily (eds), *The Military and Militarism in Africa*, CODESRIA, Dakar, 1998, p. 508.

14. See 'Last Chance for our Military', *The Post Express*, 22 June 1998.

derives from the knowledge that the long duration of military rule in Nigeria has fundamentally transformed the nature of civil-military relations.

**B**efore the January 1966 coup, it was assumed that the Nigerian military, trained in the British tradition, subscribed to the doctrine of civilian supremacy over the armed forces. The colonial military from which the Nigerian military emerged was the repressive arm of the colonial state. As such, it was fully beholden to the colonial state and had no separate agenda of its own. Thus, under colonial rule, the tradition of civilian supremacy over the military was maintained.

The 1966 coup, however, shattered the illusion that the postcolonial military, like the colonial army, would accept the doctrine of civilian supremacy. This coup and subsequent coups coupled with the long duration of military governance entrenched a myth among military officers that the armed forces were Nigeria's political messiahs. Thus, not only did the incursion of the military into the political process increase the politicization of the military and the militarization of politics, it also changed the nature of civil-military relations in Nigeria.

Military rule shifted the balance of power in favour of the military as it abrogated the doctrine of civilian supremacy, helping to entrench a strong belief among military officers that they were supreme. After all, virtually every major political decision in Nigeria over the past 30 years was made by the military or those closely associated with the institution. Moreover, even the successor civilian regimes (the Shehu Shagari government in 1979 and the Obasanjo administration in 1999) were creatures of the military.

Control of political power led the military to take it upon itself to

determine the form, nature and contents of political participation. It arrogated the power to determine not only who might rule Nigeria but the terms and circumstances of such governance. Military rule not only facilitated military supremacy over state and society in Nigeria, it also allowed the military to arrogate an ever widening array of roles and responsibilities to itself – often with disastrous consequences. It created an overbearing military marked by a mentality that the nation's resources were spoils of war that could be used and abused by soldiers.

**T**he recognition that the military has failed woefully in its self-assigned role as the moral guardian of Nigeria, coupled with the danger that continued military rule poses, have intensified the search for viable solutions to the military question. In a speech shortly after his inauguration as president, Obasanjo noted that the incursion of the military into government has been a disaster for our country and for the military over the last 30 years. The esprit-de-corps among military personnel has been destroyed; professionalism has been lost. Youth enroll into the military not to pursue a noble career but with the sole intention of taking part in coups and to be appointed as military administrators and chairmen of task forces.<sup>18</sup>

Reiterating that as a former military officer his 'heart bleeds to see the degradation in the proficiency of the military,' he promised that his administration would ensure that the military regains its 'pride, professionalism and traditions.'<sup>19</sup> Obasanjo also noted that, 'A great deal of reorientation has to be undertaken and a redefinition

of roles, retraining and re-education will have to be done to ensure that the military submits to civil authority.'<sup>20</sup> He views military professionalism as the key to civilian control of the armed forces. In Obasanjo's thinking, through professionalism and re-education, the norm of the supremacy of civil authorities will be inculcated into the military. As Muiywa Akintude has aptly observed, the aim of the government is to 'professionalize the military and ensure its permanent subordination to civil authority.'<sup>21</sup>

**S**everal measures have been taken by the Obasanjo government in an attempt to achieve the twin objectives of re-imposing civilian supremacy over the military and re-establishing the military's professionalism. The first of these measures involved military appointments made by the president. As noted earlier, Danjuma was appointed the minister of defence. Danjuma is well-respected both in and out of the military and has a wide reputation as a no-nonsense man. He served as chief of army staff during Obasanjo's tenure as a military head of state (1975-1979). Danjuma, like Obasanjo, seems committed to revamping the armed forces. It seems that Obasanjo has made a very good appointment in Danjuma as minister of defence. Danjuma seems to have the desire to re-professionalize the military. He recently told senior military officers that the behaviour of military personnel 'have so tarnished our image that many of us are ashamed to walk the streets in uniform. These are the real challenges we have as professionals and it is my duty to reverse this trend.' The only disquieting thing

20 Ibid.

21. See Muiywa Akintude, 'The General takes Lessons in Democracy', *Africa Today*, September 1999, p 9.

18. Text of an address by President Olusegun Obasanjo, Abuja, 29 May 1999.

19 Ibid.



about his appointment is his reported serious illness.<sup>22</sup>

Obasanjo also carefully selected military officers who have no apparent political ambitions as service chiefs. General Victor Malu, Air Vice Marshall Isaac Alfa, Admiral Victor Mbu and Admiral Ibrahim Ogohi were appointed chief of army staff, chief of air staff, chief of naval staff and chief of defence staff respectively. Another interesting aspect of their appointment is in terms of their ethnic and geo-political background. They are all from minority ethnic groups and the first three are from the middle-belt region of Nigeria. By ignoring officers from the major ethnic groups in the appointment of service chiefs, Obasanjo was clearly sending a signal to the armed forces that it was no longer going to be business-as-usual.<sup>23</sup> Some of these appointments were not without controversy, however. For instance, Victor Malu was the chairman of the tribunal that tried Lt. General Oladipo Diya and other military officers who were accused of attempting to overthrow the Abacha regime in 1997.

**T**he second measure taken by the administration to professionalize the armed forces and ensure its preparedness for its traditional political role was the retirement of 93 'political' officers. All military and police officers who held political appointments between 1985 and 1999 were summarily retired. According to Doyin Okupe, a presidential spokesman,

Obasanjo effected the retirement to 'achieve a clean break from years of military incursion into politics which have been an unmitigated disaster for the nation.' Okupe reiterated that the retirement was in 'keeping with the pledge made by the president in his inaugural address to the nation to initiate far-reaching measures that will ensure that... the Nigerian armed forces regain their pride and professionalism.'

**O**basanjo's summary retirement of the 'political' officers made sense on various grounds. First, most of these men had become fabulously wealthy from the various political appointments that they had held. Their continued presence in the armed forces would have created disciplinary problems. The younger officers of the rank of majors and lieutenant colonels who had served as military governors were rich and powerful. Most of them would not have countenanced receiving orders from their superior officers who, although senior to them in rank, had not enjoyed any opportunity to amass riches of their own.

Second, many of these 'political' officers were politically ambitious and would have been tempted to stage coups. Third, the 'political' officers had lost touch with military professionalism and were more interested in using their military ranks for private aggrandizement of wealth. Finally, it is generally known that soldiers who held political appointments were extremely corrupt. The Obasanjo government could not afford to be waging war against corruption and leaving in place some of the most egregiously corrupt military officers.

A third plank in the project to professionalize the military was the disbandment of military units accused of gross violations of human rights under the Abacha regime. Major

Hamza El Mustapha, Abacha's chief security officer and several others who ran these outfits, were formally charged for killing three Nigerian politicians, Kudirat Abiola, General Shehu Musa Yar'Adua and Alfred Rewane. In addition to disbanding the terror outfits, the Obasanjo government seems convinced that it was important to publicly wash the dirty linen of the Abacha regime as a strategy of discrediting military rule.

In this connection, the government has summarily seized money, houses and other properties illegally acquired by Abacha and his acolytes. Real estate acquired at give-away prices by other military officers in choice locations in Lagos and other places was also seized. In addition, all the contracts and licenses, including oil leases issued by the predecessor regime, have been revoked or suspended. Several panels of inquiry have been set up to probe past military governments.

**D**emobilization is also another major plank in the Obasanjo government's efforts to reduce the political prerogatives of the armed forces. It announced that the armed forces would be reduced from 80,000 to 50,000. Although Danjuma, in announcing this figure gave the impression that the demobilization would start immediately, the unease which this announcement generated among the military forced the government to backtrack a bit. In an address to officers and men of the 3 Armored Division of the army, Jos, in November 1999, Danjuma said:

The actual force structure will evolve from discussions with you. The impression that there will be a general demobilization exercise is not correct. Rather, only relevant provisions in the Nigerian Army Career Review programme will be implemented. Consequently, there is no need for fear and panic as I have been made to understand exist now.

22. On Danjuma's illness, see Henry Ugbohue, 'High Game of Chess', *TheNews*, 12 July 1999, pp. 14-17.

23. It should be noted, however, that Obasanjo did appoint three people from the dominant ethnic groups, General Aliu Mohammed, General Abdullahi Mohammed and Musiliu Smith as national security adviser, chief of staff (state house) and inspector general of police respectively.

Troop demobilization is scheduled to be done through a gradual process. According to Danjuma, all those who have reached the 'maximum 35 years of service or have attained the mandatory retirement age will be eased out. Then, personnel with poor disciplinary records or those who are unproductive will be disengaged. To make this exercise less painful, all personnel to be disengaged will be given attractive packages to enable them gain useful employment, with emphasis on self-employment.'<sup>24</sup>

**D**anjuma also announced that the thrust of his tenure as minister of defence would be to create a compact, highly mobile, well-trained, well-equipped, well-maintained and highly motivated armed forces. The general idea is to replace sheer number with fire power and technology. 'A reduced strength of armed forces will allow me to plan and equip them within the budget approved by the National Assembly. The strength will be organized around the existing structures but with emphasis on high mobility.'<sup>25</sup>

Danjuma's desire to create a 'compact, highly mobile, well-trained, well-equipped, well-maintained and highly motivated armed forces' is informed by several beliefs. First, it is generally recognized that the military as currently composed, is far too large for Nigeria's resources. Many Nigerians would agree that Nigeria must be the only country that retains such a large number of soldiers. Instead of a very large army, what is needed is to improve the quality of the army. Also to ensure that the person who joins the army really wants to be a soldier, not because he wants employment. Most

people who joined the force in recent times want to be soldiers because they want employment.<sup>26</sup>

**T**he administration also believes that a large military, particularly in its present configuration, presents problems in terms of civilian control. Among other things, the large size of the military is one of the reasons for its poor maintenance. Danjuma also believes that civil-military relations would be improved through improved living conditions in the barracks and by confining soldiers to the barracks. He has initiated a programme of rehabilitating the barracks.

Training, including holding joint military exercises with other militaries, is equally part of Danjuma's programme of re-professionalizing the armed forces.<sup>27</sup> In August 1999, Bruce Moore, a retired US army general, led an eight-man team of the Military Professional Resource Incorporated, to Nigeria to hold talks with military officials on how the Americans could train Nigerian military officers 'so as to strengthen them in coping with the challenges of a democratic government.' Moore announced that the training programme for the Nigerian military would 'enhance professionalism and ensure that the military subordinate themselves to civil authority.'

Another effort being made to discourage military intervention in politics is active political re-education of officers and men. Danjuma and the service chiefs have visited major military establishments to speak to military personnel on the role of the military under the new political sys-

tem. In a widely quoted speech, Danjuma explicitly ordered military commanders to dismiss 'politically-inclined officers'.<sup>28</sup> General Malu has warned that any soldier found to be 'politically inclined' would not only be dismissed but would be court-martialled as well. Malu has also ordered that 'any officer who announces a *coup d'état* on radio should simply be approached immediately after and shot.'<sup>29</sup>

**A** big challenge for the military is how to reorient itself to its customary and constitutional role of defending Nigeria's territorial integrity and subordinating the military to civil authority. General Abubakar has urged that the military should revert to its constitutional role, divest itself of involvement in politics, and subordinate itself to civil authority. On his part, General Babangida in an address to senior military officers said:

We should all ask ourselves whether or not it will be in our own corporate and even personal interest to continue to intervene in the political process of this great country at the level at which we have done so during the past twenty years... How can we ... put in place structures, institutions, processes, and values that will make military intervention in the governance of the country irrelevant and *passé*?<sup>30</sup>

In order to reassert supremacy of civil authority over the armed forces, it is imperative to supplement what the Obasanjo administration is doing with additional steps. First, there is a need for serious dialogue between the military and civilian politicians. The dialogue will open opportunities for exploring how best to restructure the military. The dialogue will also help to educate the military on civilian expectations of the armed forces.

24. Text of a speech, 'The Armed Forces Shall Rise Again', by General T. Yakubu Danjuma, to officers and men of the Mechanized Division, Nigerian Army, Kaduna, 11 October 1999.  
25. Ibid

26. Colonel Yohanna Madaki, *Sunday Punch*, 26 September 1999, p. 27.

27. For instance, a joint military exercise will be held with the British military in the early part of 2000. See *The Guardian*, Wednesday, 3 November 1999

28. *The Guardian*, Tuesday, 12 October 1999

29. See *Nigeria News Network*, 8 October 1999.

30. Ibrahim Babangida, *For Their Tomorrow We Gave Our Today. Selected Speeches of IBB*, Safari Books, Ibadan, 1991, p. 168.

Second, it is important to organize seminars and workshops on the political re-education of the military to emphasize that the military has no duty to intervene in the political process. Though Afolabi's claim that 'There can't be anything like coup in this country for now; if any soldier messes up, even Nigeria's grass will rise up against such coup,'<sup>31</sup> is an obvious hyperbole, it does capture a general sentiment in the country that Nigeria no longer has any tolerance for military intervention in politics. Danjuma appears to be aware of this. As he has pointed out:

We must resist the temptation to be cajoled into illegal activities like coups. The era of coups is gone worldwide, so we must learn to subordinate ourselves to civil authority. For those who may feel inclined to such illegal acts, now is the best time to leave, as the armed forces have no place for political officers. Your commanders have been directed to search and flush out such officers to save our nascent democracy and indeed the future of this great country.<sup>32</sup>

Danjuma reminded military officers that the enthronement of democracy in Nigeria has given the armed forces 'a new lease of life. It is our duty to use this lease to rediscover our good old ways and re-introduce true professionalism. The perks we used to arrogate to ourselves must be checked. All our actions will be examined critically by the public and the National Assembly. Civil-military relationships must be cordial at all times.'<sup>33</sup>

Third, it is not enough to disband the security agencies created for the sole purpose of terrorizing Nigerians. All soldiers who engaged in human rights violations must be prosecuted. Fourth, the international community can help the Nigerian government by providing funds for demobilization and resettlement of military personnel.

31. Afolabi is the Internal Affairs Minister in the Obasanjo government. See *The Guardian*, 18 October 1999.

32. See *The Guardian*, 12 October 1999.

33. Ibid.

## Minority rights in plural societies

JOHN MUKUM MBAKU

At no other period in recent African history have the issues of peaceful coexistence of groups and the rights of minorities, especially ethnic minorities, been of such importance to governance in the continent. Africans saw independence as an opportunity to bring about new dispensations that would (i) enhance peaceful coexistence of groups; (ii) provide participatory, accountable and transparent governance structures; and (iii) maximize entrepreneurial effort and the creation of wealth that people need to deal more effectively with massive poverty and deprivation.

The new dispensations were expected to enhance the ability of each ethnic group to maximize its values without infringing on the ability of others to do the same. Each ethnic nationality was supposed to be granted a significant level of autonomy and allowed to pursue its interests within the legal and political boundaries set by the state. Ethnic mobilization to capture resources, however, was not expected to be destructive or violent since the government was to have provided, at the federal level, structures (e.g., well-defined and enforced property rights regimes, especially in

environmental resources; efficient and effective institutions such as an independent judiciary, a professional civil service, and so on) for the peaceful resolution of conflict.

Unfortunately, the decolonization process did not adequately prepare the African peoples and the colonies for independence. The critical domains – which had been structured to serve primarily the needs and interests of the Europeans – were supposed to be transformed properly so that they could effectively and fully serve the needs of Africans in the post-independence society. This was never carried out since decolonization was a reluctant and opportunistic process in which the departing Europeans failed or refused to help the Africans develop more effective laws and institutions for their new societies.

**P**erhaps more important was the fact that constitution making in the pre-independence period was dominated and controlled by (i) the colonial state; (ii) resident European entrepreneurs, including settlers – especially in colonies such as South Africa and Southern Rhodesia; and (iii) a few Europeanized indigenous urban elites. These three groups were not well informed on social, political and economic conditions in the rural sections of the colonies.

This top-down, non participatory approach to constitutionalism resulted in institutional arrangements that have since contributed significantly to poverty and deprivation in the African countries. The benefits of post-independence economic growth have accrued primarily to ruling elites and their foreign benefactors. The bulk of Africans, especially historically marginalized groups and communities, have received virtually no benefits, but have been forced to bear most of the costs of the perverse

economic programmes that have been promoted by the ruling elites as they seek more ways to enrich themselves.

Groups like the Ogoni of Nigeria are a good example of minority ethnic nationalities that have been devastated by the opportunism of national leaders and their foreign collaborators. While the mining of petroleum from the Ogoni lands has enriched Nigeria and provided many industrialized economies with essential raw materials for production, the process has totally destroyed the Ogoni ecosystem, imposed on the people enormous environmental costs, and denied them most of the revenues obtained from the sale of the oil.

The Ogonis, of course, are not the only indigenous minority group in Africa whose welfare has been affected negatively by the post independence political opportunism of their national leaders. The marginalization of indigenous groups is a continent-wide problem, made possible by the institutional arrangements adopted at independence (see, e.g., Mbaku 1997).

In this paper, we argue that the most effective way to protect the rights of minority ethnic groups is to develop and adopt institutional arrangements that guarantee minority rights and enhance the ability of these groups to have significant input into policies that affect their lives. If the appropriate institutional arrangements are provided, groups will still compete, often very intensively, for resources, but such competition would not involve violence.

**A**fricans, especially those whose traditions, cultures, political and economic systems, and values had been destroyed by colonialism, their property rights abrogated, and their ability to support themselves subverted by

colonial policies, saw decolonization and independence as an opportunity to reconstruct their societies and provide themselves with institutional arrangements that would enhance their ability to maximize their values. The post-independence dispensation was expected to be some variant of constitutional federalism in which individual political units (expected to be ethnic nations) would be granted significant levels of autonomy – allowing them to choose their own governance systems and have significant control over the allocation of their own resources.

**D**uring the colonial period, peaceful coexistence had been achieved through violence – usually the colonial state using its comparative advantage in the employment of violence to force groups into compliance. Effective government, as has been argued by many public choice theorists (see, e.g., Gwartney and Wagner 1988, p. 30), should be a 'consensual arrangement designed for the mutual betterment of all.' Such a government must be designed by the people themselves and should not be imposed externally. Unfortunately, constitution making in these new countries was dominated by a few individuals and groups, with significant national political opinion denied participation. As a consequence, the outcome was non-consensual institutional arrangements which failed to reflect the needs, aspirations, customs and traditions of the African peoples.

Below we shall examine, briefly, two examples of how poor constitution making at independence resulted in the marginalization and colonization of some indigenous minority groups by others.

Laying the Foundation for Apartheid: the South Africa Act of 1909 (9 Edward VII, c.9): In 1908,

white representatives of four of Britain's southern African colonies (Cape of Good Hope, Natal, the Transvaal, and the Orange Free Colony), decided to convene a convention and determine if the territories should unite to form a single polity and what the nature of the union would be. They met and deliberated for six months and produced a document that was cast in the form of a draft bill and sent to the colonies' administrative centres for approval. After it was ratified by the governments of the four colonies, delegates were selected and sent, together with the bill, to England to seek enactment by the British Parliament.

In September of 1909, the British Parliament approved the draft bill as the South Africa Act (9 Edward VII, c. 9). It went into effect on 31 May 1910 establishing the Union of South Africa. Although the bill was an act of the British government, it was actually a constitutional compact developed exclusively by white representatives of the four colonies. The majority black population (Africans, coloureds and Asians) was neither provided facilities to participate nor allowed to even engage in any discourse about the process. Since only whites, who were in the minority, were allowed to participate in constitution making, the outcome was constitutional rules which were unlikely to reflect the values, interests, traditions, and expectations of the majority of the people of the new country.

In fact, as the evidence would later show, the dispensation that came into effect in 1910 did not allow all South Africans to maximize their values, but served as an instrument to advance the interests of the white minority (Cowen 1961, pp. 43-63). For example, despite the fact that Africans constituted the majority of

the people in the four colonies, no African language was included in the official list of national languages. The National Parliament eventually passed laws that effectively prevented all blacks from participating in the political affairs of the new country and limited their economic involvement to activities that enhanced the welfare of whites.

The domination and control of constitution making by whites provided the framework within which the system of apartheid later developed and became entrenched in South Africa. Beginning with the passage in 1911 of the Mines and Works Act, the National Parliament put into effect several laws that entrenched and enhanced the concept of white supremacy, and promoted a policy of permanent non-white inferiority. When the Afrikaner dominated National Party recaptured the government in 1948, it formally established the policy of apartheid through the consolidation of laws that had been passed in the country since 1911, effectively putting the black population under a form of internal colonization that lasted until 1994 (Doxey 1961, Davenport 1977, Hutt 1964, Parker 1983, Sowell 1993).

**C**onstitutionalism and the Recolonization of Anglophone Cameroonians: In 1884, Germany founded a colony called Kamerun on the Cameroon River district along the Gulf of Biafra. In 1914, World War I started in Europe and by 1916, French and British expeditionary forces had overrun Kamerun and partitioned it into British and French zones of influence. Britain received two narrow discontinuous portions (British Southern Cameroons and British Northern Cameroons) of Kamerun – along the eastern border with Nigeria – and the French took nearly four-fifths of the

territory. The French portion was granted independence in January 1960 as the République du Cameroun (LeVine 1964, Rudin 1938).

In United Nations' supervised plebiscites, British Northern Cameroons opted to join the independent Federation of Nigeria, and British Southern Cameroons decided to form a union with the République du Cameroun on 1 October 1961 called the Federal Republic of Cameroon. Ahmadu Ahidjo, the president of the République du Cameroun, became the first executive officer of the federation (LeVine 1964, Enonchong 1967).

In May 1972, Ahidjo abolished the country's highly centralized federalist system, replaced it with a unitary political system and changed the name of the country to the United Republic of Cameroon. By this time the country had abandoned multiparty politics and the Cameroon National Union (CNU), which had been founded in 1966, was now the country's only legal political party. On 6 November 1982, Ahidjo voluntarily resigned his position as the country's chief executive and handed the government to his prime minister, Paul Biya (Kofele-Kale 1986; Mbaku 1993).

Cameroonians had two opportunities to arm themselves with appropriate institutional arrangements: first, when the UN Trust Territory of Cameroons under French administration gained independence in 1960; and during the union between British Southern Cameroons and the République du Cameroun in 1961. A brief examination of constitution making in the former German territory will help us understand why the institutional arrangements adopted by the République du Cameroun and by the Federal Republic of Cameroon were inefficient and not viable foundations

for the construction of effective, transparent and accountable governance structures.

The decolonization of the UN Trust Territory of Cameroons under French administration has been examined by many scholars (see, e.g., LeVine 1964; Joseph 1977; Welch 1966). Our main objective in this section is to examine the process through which the République du Cameroun developed its constitutional rules and how it resulted in the adoption of rules that enhanced the ability of the post-independence ruling coalition to engage in political opportunism.

**T**he first constitution of the République du Cameroun was drafted by the consultative committee, created by Law No. 59-56 of 31 October 1959 (Enonchong 1967, p. 80). In proper constitution making, membership in the constitution drafting committee must reflect the character of the society to be governed by the rules selected. In addition, these individuals must be elected either directly by the people (i.e., the relevant stakeholders) or selected by their elected representatives.

Unfortunately, constitution making in the French administered territory was not conducted in the appropriate manner. For one thing, the Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC), then the territory's largest and most important indigenous political organization and the only one representing a significant part of national political opinion, was not allowed to participate in constitution making. The decision by colonial authorities to exclude the UPC from participation in the preparations for independence, especially in constitution making, effectively denied the bulk of Cameroonians an opportunity to select their own institutional arrangements.

UPC policy was to withdraw an independent Cameroon from the French community in an effort to minimize the influence of French entrepreneurial and commercial interests on the post-independence economy. On 13 July 1955, French colonial administrators proscribed the UPC party and effectively forced it underground. The banning of the UPC was designed primarily to (a) eliminate its ability to determine the pace of decolonization; and (b) make certain that it did not become the governing party in the post-independence period. Since the UPC was, at the time, the colony's only true nationalist political organization and the only one with the wherewithal to evolve into a national movement, the proscription inflicted significant damage on political developments in the territory.

**O**f course, there were other indigenous political parties in the colony at the time of the banning of the UPC. Unlike the UPC, however, these other political organizations were considered by most Cameroonians as elitist and primarily as vehicles for the maximization of the interests of ethno-regional elites. On the other hand, the UPC was considered the 'people's party'—one that represented the interests of ordinary Cameroonians, especially those whom colonialism had exploited and brutalized. The UPC's strong and unwavering support for immediate independence and reunification (with the British administered territories) without preconditions, attracted the support of many non-elite elements, the majority of whom were no longer willing to accept their continued poverty and marginalization.

The rural and urban poor resented the privileges enjoyed by many indigenous elites and felt that these individuals were not genuinely

interested in independence, especially since many of these urban-based elites appeared to side with the French view that decolonization had to be gradual and autonomy granted only when colonial authorities were satisfied that Cameroonians could govern themselves. UPC leaders, on the other hand, publicly and vehemently condemned Europeans for their extravagant lifestyles, all of which were made possible by the continued exploitation of the indigenous peoples. The party's public pronouncements betrayed its desire to rid Cameroon society of the French and establish a new dispensation that would enhance the ability of Cameroonians to rule themselves and control their own destiny (LeVine 1964; Joseph 1977).

**W**hat the consultative committee produced turned out to be a thinly disguised copy of the constitution of the French Fifth Republic (1958). That constitution making, the most important part of a transition to democratic governance, was not taken seriously is evidenced by the fact that the territory achieved independence on 1 January 1960 without a constitution! It was not until 21 February 1960 that a constitution was presented to the people for approval. The opposition, led by the outlawed UPC, encouraged Cameroonians to reject it. The results of the referendum on the draft constitution appear to support the claims made by the opposition. As many as 531,000 votes were cast against ratification and only 797,498 votes cast in favour of adoption (LeVine 1964, p. 221).

It is important to note here that during the campaign for ratification the UPC party, the main opposition group, was still banned and as a consequence was unable to launch an effective effort to educate Came-

roonians on the deficiencies of the document. On the other hand, supporters of the document could legally operate and had access to virtually all state resources.

Since the constitution is the primary basis for mutual coexistence and the foundation for building the country's institutions (e.g., a professional and neutral armed force, a properly constrained police force, an independent judiciary, an efficient and representative legislature, etc.) and its governance structures, the relatively strong vote against adoption should have alerted the new leadership to the fact that process was very important and that the new constitutional compact had serious shortcomings and was likely to generate a lot of problems for governance in the new country (Mbaku 1998, 1999a, b).

**D**uring the second year of independence, President Ahidjo turned his attention to reunification with the British Southern Cameroons which was not yet independent. Reunification offered Cameroonians an opportunity to engage in the type of constitution making that had eluded them during decolonization activities in the French administered territory. This time, all relevant population groups could elect representatives and send them to meet in conference and design a voluntary agreement that would define their relationship with each other in the new nation.

Leaders of the Southern Cameroons believed that the expected union with the République du Cameroun would be a loose voluntary association between political equals, each (constitutionally) allowed to retain a significant level of its political and economic autonomy. In such a union, each composite unit would be allowed to (a) retain its own institutions; (b) manage its own resources;

and (c) maximize its values. Unfortunately, many constraints were to make it impossible for such a federation to become a reality.

First, as has been argued by several scholars (e.g., Stark 1976), John Ngu Foncha and members of his delegation, who negotiated for the Southern Cameroons, were severely inexperienced, had very few resources, and did not have the technical support needed to engage in proper constitutional negotiations. Second, the République du Cameroun, the other partner in the union, was already an independent country with an international character, its own established laws and institutions, and a government. In addition, it had significantly more resources, including technical assistance from the French government. Third, most Southern Cameroonians, who were still resentful of domination by Nigerians when the territory was administered by Britain as part of the colony of Nigeria, overwhelmingly supported reunification.

**F**ourth, the conditions for the independence of the territory set by the UN significantly reduced Southern Cameroons' negotiating ability and made it virtually impossible for it to enter the constitutional negotiations as an equal partner to the République du Cameroun. Fifth, the République du Cameroun leadership, as well as its benefactor, France, seemed to be quite satisfied with the institutional arrangements then in existence in the country. As a consequence, they were not likely to allow institutional changes that could have weakened the power of the central government or reduced French influence in the region.

Not all République du Cameroun constituencies, of course, were satisfied with the existing laws and

institutions. Increasing political violence in the immediate post independence period and the country's decision to maintain a strong French military presence, especially in areas considered to be UPC strongholds, were indicative of the significant level of dissatisfaction with institutions that were viewed by many people as exploitative and oppressive and designed to create and maintain privileges for the ruling elite.

**F**inally, as has been argued by several scholars (e.g., Kofele-Kale 1987) and as the evidence has since indicated, the Anglophone elites who negotiated on behalf of Southern Cameroons were primarily interested in monopolizing power in an autonomous Anglophone state. Thus, they showed no interest in working hard to secure federal rules which would have guaranteed transparency and accountability in post reunification government. They wanted an autonomous state which they could control and as a consequence, were easily duped into accepting Ahidjo's promises of autonomy for the former British administered territory instead of insisting on proper constitution making with full and effective participation by the people they were supposed to be representing.

The British Southern Cameroons was offered two options for independence. It could gain independence by either merging with Nigeria or the République du Cameroun. Given the fact that Nigeria and the République du Cameroun were already independent countries, it was not likely that these countries would set aside their institutional arrangements and engage in the kind of constitution making that would have allowed Southern Cameroons to select rules favourable to its values.

Unfortunately, the constraints placed on the colony by the UN and the UK, political inexperience and a certain level of ineptitude and opportunism on the part of its leaders, lack of resources, and the fact that the territory entered the negotiations as a colony made the constitutional environment non-competitive. For example, the Southern Cameroons delegation could not, in response to opportunism by the République du Cameroun, employ the threat of exit – and subsequent existence as a sovereignty – since UN conditions for independence had precluded such an option.

**G**iven the fact that Ahidjo and his delegation dominated and controlled the pre-unification constitutional deliberations, it was not surprising that the outcome was not a federalist document. Instead, a list of 'Transitional and Special Dispositions' was inserted in what was basically the old constitution of the République du Cameroun, supposedly to keep each unit's laws and institutions in place until additional negotiations could be undertaken to turn the new union into a fully functioning federation.

Many Southern Cameroonians feared that Ahidjo's proclivity toward centralized governance would force the union into a unitary state and cause the English-speaking state to lose its autonomy. Such fears were to prove prophetic. For example, at reunification, the new federated state of West Cameroon (former Southern Cameroons) was asked to surrender most of its sources of revenue – including customs duties, to the central government in Yaoundé in favour of temporary appropriations from the latter. The federal government was expected to engage in discussions with West Cameroon leaders to put into place structures that would ensure

the state's fiscal autonomy. Such a discourse, however, never took place and the state eventually became totally dependent on the central government for all its finances.

The dependency effectively destroyed the political autonomy that was supposed to have been granted the federated state as part of the federalist governance system that had been established through reunification. The constitution adopted at reunification did not provide the state of West Cameroon the wherewithal to exist as an autonomous political unit. In addition to the fact that the fiscal relationship between the state and the central government was not made explicit in the constitution, customs taxes, which had been the state's major source of public revenue, now accrued to the government in Yaoundé. As a consequence, the federated state found itself unable to function without continuous subventions from the central government (Benjamin 1972, 1980).

**M**any of these problems could and should have been anticipated and dealt with effectively during constitutional deliberations. It is at this stage that the relationship between political jurisdictions (in a federation) are defined and elaborated in the constitution in order to avoid the kinds of problems that led to the recolonization of West Cameroon and the destruction of its institutions. Of course, the constitutional environment in existence at the time made dealing with these problems virtually impossible even if Southern Cameroons leaders had anticipated them (Bayart 1978). However, it must be noted that Southern Cameroons leaders had different objectives from those of the people they were supposed to be representing.

As mentioned earlier, the leaders were not interested in an Anglophone state with transparent, accountable

and participatory governance structures – that is a state in which the government was significantly constrained and popular participation was constitutionally guaranteed. Instead, they desired an autonomous political jurisdiction within the federation which they could control politically and as a consequence, have the opportunity to exploit economically for their own benefit.

**D**espite the unfavourable constitutional environment in Fomuban, there were opportunities for a representative and less opportunistic delegation to secure federal rules that would have been more favourable to the Southern Cameroons than the ones that became the federation's new constitution. Such rules might not have been ideal but would have been significantly more in line with Southern Cameroons' values and needs than the Fomuban Constitution of 1961.

Resource allocation was controlled and directed from the centre with the benefits of exploiting local resources accruing entirely to the central government. Pervasive political opportunism, including corruption, has ensured that public revenue allocations are skewed in favour of the politically dominant groups and those (e.g., the military) that have the wherewithal to threaten regime security. Many local communities, which are endowed with significant amounts of natural resources, remain extremely poor and deprived as exploitation of these resources continues to primarily benefit members of the ruling coalition and their supporters.

For example, despite the fact that revenues from oil wells in the Anglophone western part of the country have, since the mid-1980s, comprised a very significant part of the national budget, the region remains essentially underdeveloped and des-



titute. West Cameroon's resources are being exploited for development in other parts of the country while the people are further impoverished and forced to live in a severely polluted environment.

**T**he relationship between constitutionalism and the protection of the rights of minority groups can be summarized by two schools of thought. First, many scholars believe that modern constitutions can empower minority, disadvantaged and historically marginalized groups and significantly improve their ability to participate in governance and in economic processes. Constitutionalism can establish institutions of democratic accountability and provide avenues for all groups to resolve their conflicts peacefully (see, e.g., Brennan and Buchanan 1985; Buchanan 1975; Buchanan and Tullock 1962; Congleton 1994). Second, another school with opposing views of constitutionalism argues that the latter cannot deal effectively with such problems as ethnic 'cleansing', political violence, religious bigotry, and the political opportunism that is undertaken by many ethno-regional ruling coalitions in the developing countries.

One can take this skepticism of the ability of constitutionalism to deal effectively with ethnic conflict and the protection of minority rights as a point of departure and view constitutional arrangements as not permanent and determinate, but structures that can be changed or reconstructed to deal with new realities as they arise (Tiruchelvam 1999). Throughout Africa, constitutions have failed to uphold democratic values and human rights, including the rights of minority groups. In several instances, constitutions have been used to support and enhance the exploitation of indigenous groups and the marginaliza-

tion and/or colonization of many communities (cf. the apartheid constitution in South Africa; the reunification constitution of 1961 in Cameroon).

In addition to the fact that such uses of the law have destroyed the faith of many African people in the constitutions of their respective countries, they have also forced a new discussion on the increasing disparity between constitutional theory and real life constitutional practices. In fact, in the last several years, questions such as (i) 'What use is a constitution if it is only going to be ignored by the country's leaders?'; and (ii) 'What is the point of writing a constitution when we know that whoever is elected president will simply manipulate the rules to allow himself to remain in power indefinitely and plunder the economy for his own benefit and that of his supporters?' have become quite pervasive in the literature on African political economy.

**P**art of the problem arises from the fact that many of those who are skeptical of the value of the constitution to African societies believe that the dominant mode of constitutionalism in the continent today is Eurocentric and came with colonialism. While there is some truth to that, especially when one considers the fact that most of the constitutions in the continent today are either based on some European model or are a copy of the constitution of the African country's former colonizer, it is very important to understand that constitutionalism in Africa is not a gift of colonial rule. Constitutions in Africa should not be considered remnants of colonial rule and as a consequence, a measure of modernization.

Constitutionalism, especially if it is understood as the process of developing institutional arrangements for a society, predates colonial rule.

Well developed rules, although quite often implicit and thus not written, were a very important part of pre-colonial African societies. The job of modern constitutional discourse in Africa is to reconcile both sides – taking into consideration the complexities of today's societies and the mobility of populations – and produce a set of institutional arrangements for the modern state that provides structures for peaceful coexistence, while preserving the values of each side and making them intelligible to the whole society.

**W**riting about constitutionalism in Asia, Tiruchelvam (1999) laments about the growing gap between 'elite discourse and popular consciousness' (pp. 4-5). He argues that one of the most important failures of constitutionalism in the immediate post independence period in India and other countries in the region was the 'inability to take the conceptual vocabulary of rights, institutions and impersonal power into the everyday vernacular discourse of village or small town India' (p. 5). To underscore this point, he points to C.K. Raju's revelation that the first five words in the Indian Constitution – sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic, and republic – cannot be translated into any Indian language (p. 5).

This argument applies equally to many African countries. In fact, throughout the continent, the independence constitutions were written in the language of the former colonizer. In the case of many of the former French colonies the independence constitution was usually a copy of the constitution of the Fifth French Republic (see, e.g., LeVine 1964). Had such rules been developed from the bottom-up, starting at the village level, the constitution, even if written in a European language, would have

reflected local values and lent itself more to being understood by the people. Unfortunately, given the constitutions as they were, it was not likely that the majority of the people would understand them, let alone relate to them in the same fashion in which they did to their own traditional rules.

**T**hus, the most important problem with constitutionalism in Africa today is not that constitutions are incapable of resolving ethnic problems, or effectively securing minority rights, or that the ordinary people are not sophisticated enough to understand and appreciate them. The problem lies with the process through which these rules have been selected. Process is very important since it has a significant impact on the outcome—that is, the type of constitutional rules selected. The process must be inclusive, bottom-up, and participatory enough so that the people, through participation, would identify with the results, claim ownership of them, and therefore would be willing to fight to defend them.

Pre-independence constitutional discourse in most African countries was dominated by a few elites. The bulk of the African peoples—the main stakeholders—were not enfranchised and provided facilities to participate in the process. As a consequence, the outcomes of these deliberations were rules that did not reflect the people's values, interests, traditions and cultures, and were generally not understood by them.

The above discussion points to the fact that long-term solutions to violent ethnic conflict and pervasive problems of governance, and the exploitation of minority ethnic groups in Africa must be found in state reconstruction to provide more effective institutional arrangements—those that (a) adequately constrain the state and the ability of civil servants and

politicians to engage in opportunism; (b) enhance indigenous entrepreneurship and wealth creation; (c) guarantee individual and groups rights, including those of minority groups; (d) support the development and sustaining of a viable civil society, which will serve as a check on the exercise of government agency; and (e) generally enhance peaceful coexistence.

Within the appropriate set of rules, no group or individual would be placed at a competitive disadvantage or advantage simply because of such ascriptive characteristics as race, ethnicity, wealth, geographic location, etc. To minimize exploitation and abuse of minority groups in Africa, it is necessary to establish and sustain within each country, fair, predictable and efficient structures—including well specified and enforced property rights regimes—that can allow all individuals and groups to compete for both economic and political resources. Thus, given the appropriate structures for resource allocation, ethnic conflict need not deteriorate into violence (see, e.g., Kimenyi 1997, 1998, 1999).

**T**oday, Africa and Africans are preparing for the new century. As they do so, they face many problems. The two most important of them are (i) how to create enough wealth to deal with mounting problems of poverty and deprivation; and (ii) how to deal effectively with destructive and violent ethnic mobilization. The latter problem can be viewed from two perspectives: how to make certain that the rights of ethnic minorities are not abrogated or trampled by the majority; and how to effectively prevent the majority from engaging in behaviour that exploits and marginalizes the minority.

Since most African colonies began to gain independence in the 1960s, living standards in Africa have

either failed to improve or done so only marginally. In addition to massive poverty, destructive and violent ethnic mobilization has also become endemic to the region. Such violence derives from two main sources: (i) minority ethnic groups whose rights have been abrogated and forced to remain, permanently, on the periphery of society; and (ii) majority or politically dominant ethnic groups (usually ethno-regional ruling coalitions) whose desire to monopolize political space and the allocation of resources has forced them to engage in violent mobilization to keep other groups out of markets.

**T**his paper has argued that the most effective way to deal with destructive ethnic mobilization in Africa is to provide each country, through proper constitution making, institutional arrangements that properly constrain the exercise of government agency and thus minimize political opportunism, enhance indigenous entrepreneurship and wealth creation, and provide governance and economic structures that do not place any group at a competitive disadvantage in the competition for resources. If each African society provides itself with these types of institutional arrangements, ethnic mobilization need not be violent or destructive.

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# From idealism to genocide

PIERRE-DAMIEN MVUYEKURE

MUCH has been and continues to be written on the 1994 genocide and the ongoing tragedies in Rwanda; some writers trying to explain the genesis of the genocide (cf Grard Prunier's *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*, 1997; John A. Berry and Carol Pott Berry's *Genocide in Rwanda: A Collective Memory*, 1999), others trying to critically understand the concept of the genocide as applied to Rwanda and Burundi (cf Ren Lemarchand's 'Genocide in the Great Lakes: Which Genocide? Whose Genocide?'), and others attempting to place blame and responsibility (cf Philip Gourevitch's *We Wish To Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families: Stories from Rwanda*, 1998; Fergal Keane's *Season of Blood: A Rwandan Journey*, 1995; or Human Rights Watch's *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda* 1999).

While some critics have been quick to blame the genocide on the Habyarimana regime, others, like

Grard Prunier, have attempted to show how ethnic and regional practices may have contributed to the 'social memory' that led to the 1994 genocide. While Prunier notes that 'the Habyarimana regime up till (circa) 1988 was in general one of the least bad in Africa if one considers only its actions and not its intellectual underpinnings' (83), he fails to analyze key documents that led to the 'peace and stability'. He credits General Habyarimana for bringing peace and stability to Rwanda before 1990.

This paper explores the last 20 years of Rwanda's constitutional and ethnic policies, their shortcomings, and the possible role they played in the 1994 massacre. Through an analysis of the 1978 and 1991 Rwandan Constitutions, the statutes of the MRND, the only political party allowed during much of the Habyarimana years, and the 1993 Arusha Peace Accords, I argue that these documents were fraught with an idealistic optimism that failed to recognize the existence of

Twa, Hutu and Tutsi, and the problems existing between the last two – a recognition that would have warranted provisions about minority rights.

I argue as well that when the Rwandan Patriotic Front attacked in 1990, the war seriously weakened the few minority rights that existed, as the Tutsi population gradually became identified with the attackers, as had previously been the case on several occasions during the 1960s. The RPF attack, however, had the beneficial effect of spurring pressure for the democratization process, *le multipartisme*, which the Habyarimana government grudgingly accepted with the hope to subvert the RPF's criticism that the Hutu government was not democratic.

The paper also analyzes current practices of the Tutsi-dominated government and concludes that the democratization of Rwanda in the 21st century is still a far cry and that any democratic process should first recognize the Hutu-Tutsi problem, now compounded by the 1994 genocide, and deal with it in a straight-forward and honest manner. Otherwise, Prunier's gloomy conclusion that most 'Rwandans seem to have given up any meaningful belief in the possibility of national reconciliation' will haunt Rwanda for centuries to come.

In order to put the period under study in this paper (1973-1994 and beyond) into perspective, it is necessary to present a brief overview of how constitutions or public policies and ethnicity related to one another in Rwanda, both under King Mutara III Rudahigwa in the 1950s and President Grgoire Kayibanda from 28 January 1961 to 4 July 1973. On 14 July 1952, the Belgian administration issued a decree that instituted a High Council (*Le Conseil Suprieur du Pays*) whose main objective was not so much to

reorganize the Belgian indigenous politics in the colony under its tutorship as to limit the power of the king in order to better serve the interests of the people (Lizinde 55).

The decree was also an attempt to democratize existing governing bodies through elections that were to produce the members of the High Council. It is worth noting that the *Mwami* (king) presided over the High Council. More important is the fact that both the elections of 1953 and 1956 produced an overwhelmingly Tutsi dominated council; of the 34 members of *Le Conseil Suprieur du Pays*, only one was a Hutu, and things did not improve with the second elections in 1956.

Because each time the elections had favoured his Tutsi chiefs and sub-chiefs, King Mutara III Rudahigwa felt encouraged to declare, during a meeting of the Vice-Government of Ruanda[sic]-Urundi ('*Vice Gouvernement du Ruanda-Urundi*') on 21 April 1956, that it was impossible to define the terms *Mututsi* or *Muhutu* insofar as there existed no clear criterion to distinguish between a Tutsi and a Hutu. Yet in 1958, a special committee, *Comit d'tude du Problme Social Mututsi-Muhutu*, was set up to study the social problem between the Tutsi and the Hutu. Noteworthy is the fact that the special committee was composed of six members from the High Council and five members from the writers and signers of the 1957 *Hutu Manifesto*.

When the committee president asked whether or not the Hutu was not as represented in the indigenous administration as the Tutsi, a Hutu representative answered that the few Hutu who were in the administration were not true Hutu. Niyonzima went on to say that a true Hutu is defined by ways of doing things and by his pride

in being a Hutu (61). Grard Prunier has noted that 'even when Hutu were included in these "councils", they were the *abagaragu* [servants] of the chiefs, and as such perpetually acquiescent to their *shebuja* [Tutsi masters]'. In other words, the power was diffused 'principally among the group which already possessed it, that is to say the Tutsi caste' (47).

After long discussions, the special committee voted to recommend that the elections to the High Council be not only publicized but that special attention be given to Hutu candidacies. King Mutara III Rudahigwa's reaction was to deny that there was any discrimination based on ethnicity: 'We don't differentiate between the two races to elect candidates to public offices; they're chosen according to their capacity and merits' (Kagame quoted in Lizinde, p. 70). This reaction clearly contradicted his former position on ethnicity by implicitly acknowledging that the terms *Mututsi* and *Muhutu* existed. It is worth noting how the Habyarimana and the Tutsi-led regimes would later pursue the same strategies.

The inequality between the Tutsi and Hutu in the colonial administration was made possible by the inequality in education, as the white missionaries had initially favoured the Tutsi chiefs' children over the Hutu; in Astrida (Butare now), there was a school, *cole des Batutsi* (School of the Tutsi), which received exclusively Tutsi students. Equally important, in 1951, the clergy whose number equalled that of the white priests, was almost exclusively composed of Tutsi.

Prunier has rightly noted that being 'better educated than the Hutu and exercising a quasi-monopoly over the native clerical positions in the colonial administration, the Tutsi of

exalted lineage had been the first to pick up on the new ideas of racial equality, colonial political devolution and possible self-government' (43). Nevertheless, a few Hutu, including Grgoire Kayibanda, had succeeded in attending the Grand Seminary of Nyakibanda; out of this seminary came the few Hutu intellectuals who, in March 1957, published a document that came to be known as the *Bahutu Manifesto* (*Manifeste y'Abahutu*) in which they decried the iniquity and racial injustices perpetrated against the Hutu population.

**F**or the nine Hutu leaders who signed the Hutu Manifesto, the problem was 'basically that of the political monopoly of one race,' the Mututsi, a monopoly that was transformed into 'an economic and social monopoly.' Furthermore, given 'the de facto selection in school, the political, economic and social monopolies turn into a cultural monopoly which condemns the desperate Bahutu to be for ever subaltern workers, that even after independence they will have contributed to gain without even realising what is in store for them. The *ubuhake* [vassalage] has been legislated away, but these monopolies have replaced it with an even stronger oppression' (Prunier 46).

According to Lizinde, the *Manifeste des Bahutu*'s most salient points were: 'The document demanded an integral emancipation of the Hutu, an emancipation thwarted by the Tutsi monopoly, later supported by the colonial administration, for many centuries. It opposed immediate independence and the departure of Europeans before this objective could be fulfilled' (72-3). It must be noted that the writers of the Hutu Manifesto were later joined by many disenfranchised Tutsi who had been deceived by the monarchy (72).

Critics like Prunier have traced the ideology of the Hutu power back to the Hutu Manifesto which not only emphasized the term 'race', a consequence of long years of European myth of the Tutsi as a 'superior race', but was diametrically opposed to removing the labels 'Muhutu', 'Mututsi', and 'Mutwa' from the identity cards (introduced by the Belgian colonial administration). Indeed, they argued that suppressing ethnic labels 'would create a risk of preventing the statistical law from establishing the reality of facts.' Prunier further notes that 'here the confusion becomes particularly serious. "Racial" statistics are set as a guideline, as a monitor of democratisation. We have here the intellectual root of the future "quota democracy" which was to become the law of the land in independent Rwanda' (46). Prunier, however, fails to note that the Hutu Manifesto's insistence on keeping the three ethnic labels in identification papers was a direct response to the High Council's suggestion that these labels be removed from official documents (Lizinde 75). Additionally, King Mutara III Rudahigwa later demanded that the terms 'Mututsi', 'Muhutu', and 'Mutwa' be dropped from official documents in the government and in schools and that all the citizens have one name, Rwandan.

**A**s Lizinde writes, the Hutu representatives protested the king's suggestion: The Hutu representatives protested, saying that they always considered themselves to be Hutu; that at any rate if the terms Muhutu, Mututsi, and Mutwa, were maintained, it would be much easier in the future to check whether or not the progress was really reaching all the social groups of Rwanda' (76).

Also pivotal to the question of ethnic policies during the colonial

period was the momentous role played by the Catholic Church, which may explain why the same Catholic Church has been vehemently criticized by the Tutsi-led government in Kigali and its priests and bishops are being charged with genocide and crimes against humanity. Until the 1950s the Catholic Church had been supportive of the colonial policies regarding administering the colony through existing administrative structures, first siding with the German administration and then with the Belgian administration. A number of scholars have cited Bishop Lon Classe as one of the staunchest supporters of the theory that the Tutsi were born to rule while the Hutu were *not* born to govern.

**I**n both 1923 and 1933 when the Belgians wanted to reverse their policies in favour of the Hutu, Bishop Classe vehemently and successfully opposed the decision. He forcefully argued that the 'greatest mistake' that the Belgian colonial administration could make 'would be to suppress the Mututsi caste' because such 'a revolution' would catapult the country into 'anarchy and to hateful anti-European communism.' Bishop Classe added that they could have 'no better, more active and more intelligent chiefs than the Batutsi. They are the ones best suited to understand progress and the ones the population likes best. *The government must work with them*' (Prunier 26).

In 1958, Bishop Aloys Bigirumwami, one of the first Rwandan clergy, denied the existence of a Hutu-Tutsi problem, the crux of his argument being based on inter-marriages between the two groups, though paradoxically he saw himself as a Hutu. A year later, Bishop Bigirumwami was to concede that there was a Hutu-Tutsi problem; he invited policy-makers to

deal with the problem forthrightly and honestly in order to find a fair solution (Lizinde 74).

In 1957, however, the Catholic Church became increasingly aware of the injustices prevailing in the country and issued a collective letter from the Bishops of 'Ruanda-Urundi', whose main topic was justice. In the letter, the Bishops of Rwanda and Burundi condemned the abuses of power of all kinds. Lizinde notes that during this period people noticed a certain relation between the Hutu grievances and the Catholic Church's position on the question of justice in the country (73). Besides, many of the writers of the Hutu Manifesto, including Grgoire Kayibanda, were ex-seminarians from the Nyakibanda Seminary. Because of this new, close relationship between the Catholic Church and the Hutu leaders, some scholars have suggested that the Hutu Manifesto was actually written by European missionaries.

It is worth pointing out that between 1957 and 1959, the Hutu-Tutsi relations were worse than they had ever been, compounded by the Hutu Manifesto and the formation of several political parties, many of which were Hutu dominated. Everything culminated into November 1959, a period that was later to be referred to as *La Révolution Sociale de 1959* from the Hutu perspective and known as the first massacre of the Tutsi by the Hutu. This was the first step in repudiating the monarchy.

Prunier has wrongly argued that the so-called revolution was not 'a fake' because it was a 'racist revolution' (347) but that it was dictated by the missionaries: 'The White Fathers told the "revolutionaries" what to do; they set the starting date and blew the whistle to get everybody back inside when the game was over. A revolu-

tionary was executed under the direction of a colonial army colonel, with the support of colonial troops and the blessing of an all-powerful Catholic Church' (348).

But Prunier seems to minimize the fact that it was a Tutsi attack on Dominique Mbonyumutwa, a Hutu sub-chief, which sparked the Hutu anger when it was believed that they had killed him. Also, he seems to ignore his own research according to which some Hutu actually fought on the king's side to save the throne (49). Jean Rumiya in *Rwanda Under the Belgian Tutelage, 1916-1931*, has cogently argued that the Revolution failed to articulate tangible reforms beyond ethnicity. 'As such the Revolution was logical in itself because it envisioned no reforms but the reversal of ethnic quotas and the creation of new social structures. Thus, the essential question relentlessly limited itself to a simple political dialectic, Hutu-Tutsi' (9).

The second step in repudiating the Tutsi dominance came between June and July 1960 when the county elections favoured heavily Kayibanda's party PARMEHUTU (Party for the Emancipation of the Hutu) with 70.4% of the votes, while the Tutsi-founded UNAR (Rwandan National Union) received 1.7% despite its boycott of the elections. A few months later, a transitional government was formed in Kigali with Kayibanda as the prime minister – 5 Hutu, 2 Tutsi, and 2 Europeans. Also, a transitional council was put in place with Joseph Gitera as its president. Noteworthy would be the absence of UNAR in both the transitional government and council (Lizinde 73).

The third step in dismantling the monarchy was an event that came to be known as *Le Coup d'Etat de Gitarama* (Coup of Gitarama) that

took place on 28 January 1961 in Gitarama. It ensued the first Rwandan Constitution, a document that would not only lead to the independence of Rwanda on 1 July 1962 but would guide the first Rwandan Republic under President Grgoire Kayibanda from 1962 to 4 July 1973.

After reading the 1961 Rwandan Constitution, one would be inclined to agree with John B. Webster who concludes in *The Political Development of Rwanda and Burundi*, that 'aside from abolishing the monarchy and effecting a *coup d'état* [sic] to insure the continuance of PARMEHUTU power, the provisions of the Constitution are in very close accord with the stage of constitutional evolution existent in Rwanda at that time' (72). A closer look at the preamble, however, suggests that insisting on the abolition of the monarchy without guaranteeing minority rights was a major flaw.

In the preamble, the members of the Legislative Assembly state that the aim of the constitution is 'to permanently liberate the people of Rwanda' and 'to endow' their country with 'a really democratic system, to calm the population, in order to form a more perfect national union, to establish justice and respect for the human person in our country, to ensure domestic tranquility, to liberate the people from the feudal and colonial yoke' ('Constitution of the Rwandese Republic' 2).

Thus, central to the writers of the Rwandan Constitution was the desire to safeguard both the 1959 social revolution and the 28 January 1961 coup against the monarchy. By 'pacifying the population' one has to understand that in 1959 and then in 1961 Kigeri V Ndahindurwa, the new king, and thousands of Tutsi exiled themselves to neighbouring countries

and that the new government feared attacks from Tutsi exiles. Equally, that while the Legislative Assembly purported 'to form a more perfect national union', in reality it was PARMEHUTU, a party whose objective was the emancipation of the Hutu, which monopolized the power.

**G**ranted, in its articles 7, 9 and 12, the 1961 Rwandan Constitution guarantees social justice and equality before the law for all Rwandan citizens without discrimination based on race, clan, colour or religion. In article 12, however, it is mentioned that the fundamental rights and liberties as provided in the Declaration of Human Rights are guaranteed to all citizens and the exceptions are to be regulated by (a future) law. One would assume that given the Hutu leaders' complaints against social injustice and ethnic iniquity, coupled with the turmoil of 1959, the writers of the first Rwandan Constitution would have provided articles that addressed the quintessential question they had been grappling with since the 1950s.

Failure to keep addressing the Hutu-Tutsi problem in a forthright manner – except article 11 that addresses the extradition of political refugees that must be authorized within the limits of the law – would be disastrous for the country, as the young Republic would be governed in the manner of a monarchy. Prunier has correctly noted that under 'Kayibanda's presidency the young Hutu republic took on a strange tinge' insofar as in 'many ways the President was in fact the *mwami* [king] of the Hutu.' The same style of leadership applied, and his 'deliberate remoteness, authoritarianism and secretiveness' ironically recalled the old kings' leadership style.

Equally interesting is that just as the Tutsi kings 'used to manipulate

the main Tutsi chiefly lineage in order to balance their power, President Kayibanda played the ex-Nyakibanda seminarians against the Astrida graduates and his Gitarama clansmen against both Butare and Ruhengeri' (57). Similarly, the Habyarimana's government would pin the *Abakiga*, *Abarera* and *Abashiru*, or 'northerners' from respectively Byumba, Ruhengeri, and Gisenyi prefectures, against the *Abanyenduga* from south and central Rwanda.

Since 8 May 1960, Kayibanda's PARMEHUTU party became MDR-PARMEHUTU (Democratic Republican Movement-PARMEHUTU), the only political party that was to lead the young republic until 1973. Lizinde has pointed out that according to article 10 of the statutes of the MDR-PARMEHUTU, the latter aimed at 'solving, once and for all and peacefully, the problem of coexistence of different ethnic, racial, and social groups established in the country, in all areas of administrative, political, economic, social, and cultural progress [my translation]' (Kayibanda G. quoted in Lizinde 156).

**I**n its fourth manifesto, *Manifeste n° 4 du MDR PARMEHUTU*, it is pointed out that the MDR 'endeavoured to ensure equality of opportunity, of rights and duties, to all the citizens of Rwanda without any discrimination. It condemned all forms of racial discrimination on the national territory in particular and in Africa in general [my translation].' Moreover, Lizinde cogently notes that this theoretical idealism was contradicted by other stipulations such as that the MDR-PARMEHUTU was the party of those who were 'mobilized to fight in a democratic manner against the injustice perpetrated against Gahutu and all the destitute people in their own country by the feudal power of

the Tutsi monarchy' [my translation] (156).

**T**o this democracy in the name of and for the Hutu, were added sporadic attacks by the Tutsi exiles between 1961 and 1964, which exacerbated the ethnic relations insofar as each time there was an attack there followed reprisals against the Tutsi population many of whom did not have anything to do with the Tutsi exiles' attacks. In 1973, the ethnic climate in Rwanda worsened when attacks against Tutsi students began in secondary schools in Gitarama, Kayibanda's native region, and spread quickly throughout the country. President Kayibanda, his MDR-PARMEHUTU, as well as the government simply let the country slouch towards the abyss.

I remember how the Tutsi of my commune lived in constant fear, not knowing what might happen to them. While some of them left to return later when things were calmer, others decided to stay. Luckily, our mayor banned any burning of Tutsi houses or looting of their cattle. I also remember that during the last years of Kayibanda's presidency, the Hutu who were not from Gitarama had a hard time finding jobs or passing the national exam for secondary schools. As a matter of fact, corruption was so rampant that the names of those who had passed the national exam were erased at the commune level and replaced by children from rich or well-connected parents.

Also noteworthy is the fact that during this period the relations with neighbouring countries like Burundi deteriorated. I remember how in June and early July 1973, President Kayibanda and President Michel Micombero of Burundi traded insults on their national radios. It is in this climate that the Rwandan army chief of staff and defence minister, General



Juvnal Habyarimana, took power, banned all the formation of political parties and dissolved the National Assembly.

Critics like Fergal Keane have speculated that 'it is widely suspected that Habyarimana was behind the 1973 turbulences' so as to instigate violence and then stage 'a coup in order to quell the same violence' (21). No evidence of this, however, is provided. Yet during 1973, I remember rumours that the next president was going to be an army officer from the North, rumours most probably based on the rift between people from Ruhengeri and Gisenyi on the one hand, and Gitarama on the other.

Prunier has rightly noted that because the Habyarimana regime ended in genocide, people tend 'to project back upon the whole of the Habyarimana regime' their 'knowledge of ultimate evil' (74). Keane argues that when Habyarimana took power on 5 July 1973, his 'rule did not, as many Tutsi had feared, precipitate a total onslaught against the minority.' On the contrary, 'Habyarimana appeared to go out of his way to stress national unity and appealed for an end to ethnic bloodletting' (21). When he assumed power in 1973, people were very optimistic that things were going to improve economically, socially and politically.

Under the leadership of Habyarimana and for a period of 15 years, Rwanda experienced what Prunier has called the 'good years', referring to the fact that 'General Habyarimana had brought peace and stability to Rwanda' (76). While Prunier cogently argues that these peaceful and prosperous years extracted a heavy price insofar as Habyarimana banned political parties and founded his own party, MRND, he fails to analyze the statutes and manifesto that informed

Habyarimana's political ideology. Indeed, a closer analysis of the manifesto and statutes of the National Revolutionary Movement (MRND) reveals such a high level of political and ethnic idealism and optimism that one wonders what went wrong in 1994. Worth noting, too, is the fact that though Habyarimana had modelled the single party system after Grégoire Kayibanda's MDR-PARMEHUTU, he astutely avoided an ethnic labelling.

When MRND was founded on 5 July 1975, its manifesto laid out the political, economic, social, and cultural policies that would lead the country to peace, unity, and progress (*Ubumwe, Amahoro, Amajyambere* in Kinyarwanda), three words that were repeated for almost 20 years at every official gathering or cultural events. Furthermore, unlike the Tutsi kings (like Mutara Rudahigwa) who refused to accept that there was an ethnic problem in Rwanda, Habyarimana was acutely aware that the progress of Rwanda hinged upon the unity between the Hutu, the Tutsi and the Twa.

In the preamble of the manifesto of MRND, Habyarimana argued that division and hate among Rwandan citizens hinder national development and that peace and unity would be the cornerstone of his government policies. Furthermore, he condemned all separatist or racist tendencies as well as beliefs in racial, ethnic, group, regional, and religious superiority (*Manifeste et Statuts* 87).

More importantly, the National Revolutionary Movement for Development aimed at helping all Rwandan citizens achieve the following:

- \* Definitive uprooting of the consequences of hate and division created by the history of our country among the three ethnic groups and regions;
- \* Coalition of all forces against psy-

chological and socio-economic underdevelopment;

- \* Ban against a Rwandan mentality concerning feudality: spirit of caste and court intrigues that hinder national development;
- \* End all forms of exploitation of man by man;
- \* Vigorous fight against laziness, banditry, and ethnic, regional and religious radicalism.

Despite this ethnic idealism there was always a sub-culture of Hutu hardliners in the government who felt that in terms of employment and education (high school and higher education) priority should be given to the Hutu in order to redress the injustices incurred by the Hutu during the Tutsi monarchy. During this period, however, many Tutsi changed their ethnic affiliations and passed for Hutu, at least in their identification cards, allowing them to get scholarships and jobs in the government. So when Prunier argues that 'life was difficult for the Tutsi who were victims of institutional discrimination,' he is not entirely right. However, he is correct when he points out that under the Habyarimana regime many Tutsi prospered as businessmen and 'were on very good terms with the regime' (76).

The so-called ethnic quota system (known as *équilibre ethnique*) that many critics, including Prunier, have pointed out as an example of institutional discrimination against the Tutsi, was not as poignant as regional quotas (*équilibre régionale*) whereby the northern regions of the country, where the president came from, received more students to high schools and more scholarships to the university (local and international) than any other region in Rwanda.

Thus, if the Tutsi were victims of institutional discrimination, theirs

was part of a larger discrimination that was more massive and more important than the ethnic quota system. Here again, if the 1978 and 1991 Rwandan Constitutions had provided (beyond guaranteeing basic human rights to all Rwandan citizens) special sections about minority rights, the ethnic quota system could have been avoided. Equally interesting is the fact that both the 1993 Arusha Accords and the 1995 new Constitution lack these provisions; one would think that the Rwandan Patriotic Front, which purported to bring democracy to Rwanda, would have insisted upon having such provisions in both documents.

In 1996, the new Rwandan government banned ethnic labelling in identification cards, a move clearly designed to remove the terms Hutu, Tutsi and Twa from official discourse. The irony, of course, is that the government continues to talk about apprehending the 'Hutu killers'. The point to be made here is that banning these terms from identification cards will not prevent the Hutu from seeing themselves as Hutu, the Tutsi as Tutsi, and the Twa as Twa. Furthermore, removing these labels has not stopped the RPF-led government from oppressing the Hutu population, including some Tutsi survivors, ostensibly because they collaborated with the Hutu killers.

**C**learly, here is a discrepancy between the government's (seemingly) public policies and what actually happens in practice. Actually, many Tutsi in Rwanda today seem to be worse off than they had ever been during the Hutu-dominated government of Habyarimana; many Tutsi who have the means have been leaving a country whose government is supposed to be Tutsi-led.

For there to be peace in Rwanda, there needs to be greater emphasis on

national reconciliation than on the genocide discourse, because demonizing an entire Hutu population for crimes committed by a few is counter-productive. This would include punishing those who truly committed crimes against humanity, including soldiers from the Rwandan Patriotic Front – news media like the *National Post* and *Associated Press* have recently reported that the UN is investigating high-ranking members of Paul Kagame's government for war crimes committed in 1994 as the RPF advanced towards Kigali – and exonerating the majority of the Hutu population who did not participate in the genocide.

**F**urthermore, there needs to be a national debate on the Hutu-Tutsi problem, the kind that would allow Rwandans to freely express themselves concerning their common past and to realize that although the past cannot be buried, mistakes committed in the past under both the monarchy and the colonial powers – what Catharine Newbury has called 'double colonialism' – must be avoided. This from the bottom-to-the-top approach (not the reverse) would work, because for centuries the Hutu, the Tutsi, and the Twa have lived together on the same hills.

Third, a new constitution or amendments to the constitution should be drafted to include civil rights for all citizens in order to avoid ethnic, regional, religious quotas in schools or in government jobs. Finally, instituting a multiparty system and power-sharing must underlie all political and government policies in Rwanda; otherwise, the country is likely to be trapped into a vicious cycle of wars and massacres.

For example, everybody knows that no matter how hard the Rwandan government fights in the Democratic

Republic of Congo (hoping to capture Interahamwe and the Hutu killers), the current Tutsi-led government is losing ground. What would happen if the ex-Rwandan Army were to recapture the country from the Rwandan Patriotic Front?

**M**any Rwandans believe that the Hutu population, and all Rwandans in general, may have given Paul Kagame a chance to transform Rwanda into a peaceful nation, had he truly and honestly opted for national reconciliation; instead, his government has chosen to demonize the entire Hutu population.

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# Women in African literature

ANTHONIA C KALU

ALTHOUGH contemporary African literary criticism is a product of Africa's contact with the West, evaluation and analyses relevant to the African experience must be derived from methods intrinsic to African art traditions. The dynamism evident in African life today emanates from traditional consciousness which embeds the arts in all aspects of life. In pre-colonial Africa, this complex relationship mandated an incessant search for ways to improve current situations and impacted creativity in all areas of life. Colonial interference encouraged separation from African traditional reality and existence and resulted in cultural, social, political and other forms of disarticulation.

According to Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1972), the forced disengagement from familiar ways of knowing was recorded in narrative form: You know the popular story among our people – that the Mubia told the people to shut their eyes in prayer, and when later they opened their eyes, the land was taken. And then, so the story goes, the Mubia told them not to worry about those worldly things which could be eaten by moth; and they sang: *Thi ino ti yakwa ndi nwihtukiri* (this

world is not my home, I am only a pilgrim)(33).

Significantly, parts of the new narrative insisted on African people's disengagement from traditional land and arts. Consequently, African literature began early to explore the dynamics of contemporary African existence and literary criticism became grounded in the exploration of the overt expressions of the new, scriptocentric legacy. Further, the colonial educational system excluded the woman resulting in her social, cultural and political dislocation in the new dispensation. Her subsequent silence has yet to be addressed in contemporary African experience.

The dearth of African literary genres that support the African woman's participation in the (re)creation and maintenance of societal vision provides evidence of her silencing and apparent invisibility in Africa's encounter with the West. Her participation is more overt in the postcolonial arena. Although African writers did not exclude her from the emerging culture that impressed African experience for a largely external readership, her portrayal became problematic in the contemporary setting which

devised rules for her participation in the new dispensation. This seems a minor problem except that the task of reasserting the African woman's presence was left to western educated African men who, themselves, were inadequately inscribed in the new dispensation. Burdened with the responsibility for self-reclamation and the risk of a lost homeland, a significant number of early writers overtly articulated the African male.

**F**or a long time, portrayals of the African female in this postcolonial arena resonated with the concept of community and/or the female principle. Although most post-independent Africanists are aware of the dynamism of art in African society, that knowledge is rarely used to foster the new African narrative agenda in accordance with traditional norms. This is because an acceptance of the colonial experience required that most elements within ancestral heritage be reconceptualized as obstacles to creativity and advancement. Consequently, most contemporary narratives re-examine the known African world or explore the reinvented terrain circumscribed by the colonial encounter.

For those born after Independence, the problem manifests as incoherence between history, political culture and the arts. Beneficiaries of conditions of underdevelopment-already-in-progress, they accept the violence of the modern African city with its bright lights that mask corruption and filth. And, such acceptance presumes congruity with a modern African state. Given this situation, contemporary African literary criticism which deploys western analytical norms, implicitly demands continuation of violence and filth in the post-colonial state.

I am not implying here that a discussion of the negative aspects of existence and experience are not valid or acceptable. Critical appraisal is necessary and pertinent. Problems arise when these become the major foci of exploration and/or creativity. Because African thought remains significant to post-independent existence, literature and literary criticism. Contemporary African literature must continue to engage viable African literature through continuous examination and portrayal of the realities of the new dispensation. In this regard, indigenous African core statements are significant to African literature because more than the writers' ability for normal literary practice they show the capacity for change encoded in African ways of knowing. A major concern here is the re-entrenchment of women and/or female-related aspects of selected statements into contemporary discourse. The focus is to examine the society's capacity to maintain harmony and equilibrium using some recognizable predictions embedded in the selected indigenous core statements.

**F**or example, in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) the eponymous character, Efuru (the lost) is also named Nwaononaku (the child/one-who dwells-in-wealth). Her two names delineate the spaces that have developed in prevailing analyses of the African woman. However, most examination of Efuru's childlessness and her failed marriages mandate a literary criticism that mirrors Africa's economic dependence on the West. Analytically, this focus continues the disabling postures that sustained the trans-Atlantic slave trade and subsequent colonization. This viewpoint presumes that Efuru and her experiences are individual and personal

losses in an Oguta that is focused on community harmony and growth.

Such a conclusion is at odds with the widespread assumption that African ways of knowing assert the supremacy of community because it assumes a narrative vision that portrays characters whose experiences are non-essential to societal objectives and goals. This study of the African woman seeks to transcend current pressures to normalize the adversity and disunity in the African woman's experience. Rather than facilitating her full domestic and international participation, such pressures hinder her and stall African advancement. A brief survey of some prevailing viewpoints in contemporary African literature will illustrate what I mean here.

**A**ctivist Feminism: A prevailing view in African literary criticism is rooted in the need to create a niche for the female African writer and critic within the contemporary literary tradition. This approach develops out of the years of silence and struggle that many African women scholars experienced in the academic arena. Many African women scholars opposed the silencing which seemed supported by a male-dominated African literary criticism. In theory, activist feminism maintains that only the African woman can convincingly explore her experience. This school seeks validation of the African woman through in-depth exploration of other exclusionary traditions. Subscribers also agree that: 'African feminist criticism is definitely engaged criticism in much the same way as progressive African literary criticism grapples with decolonization and feminist criticism with the politics of male literary dominance' (Davies, 12).

Though most adherents agree that 'for African feminists, the double allegiance to women's emancipation

and African liberation becomes one' (Davies, 12), they find that Negritude, for example, was wrong-headed in creating romantic and mythic images of the African woman. Also, the African male writer and/or critic's glorification of African motherhood is seen as oppressive and offensive because their expressed views conform to 'other prescribed female role which is at the core of most African poetry' (6). However, this school's argument ignores the fact that the creation of mythic African womanhood is coextensive with the proposal that the African woman's world be seen through her own eyes.

**B**y assuming a universalistic approach to liberation, women's emancipation, African liberation and African women's emancipation, this approach evokes a veneration of the African woman with 'mountains on her back.' It uses a postcolonialist feminist ideology that prompts a metaphysical filter of inclusion by exclusion, to set up barriers similar to those whose elimination remains part of its agenda. But stated commitment to the cause of the African woman's liberation is usually present as a major concern. Significant analyses advocate a confrontational research programme that perceives the African woman's liberation as a struggle against non-feminists, perceived traditionalists and men.

Borrowing from activist oriented ideologies, this research programme (re)defines the African woman's world for her, setting parameters that are based on what she ought to see rather than on her reality. However, this school admits the existence of pockets of power which 'allowed' women by recognizing aspects of women's participation in decision-making institutions within traditional African communities. Generally, it

faults all men for keeping power to themselves and, in particular, African men for not decrying debilitating African traditions that seek the perpetuation of oppressive roles for the African woman.

**M**issionary Feminism: This school of thought employs a predominantly moral approach. Some aspects of feminist consciousness grounds the thinking of most adherents. One of its earliest practitioners was Amanda Berry Smith, a 19th century African American missionary in Africa. Part of her report on African women presents most of the issues that current missionary feminists deal with and deserves quoting in detail:

The poor women of Africa, like those of India, have a hard time. As a rule, they have all the hard work to do. They have to cut and carry all the wood, carry all the water on their heads, plant all the rice. The men and boys cut and burn the bush, with the help of the women; but sowing the rice, and planting the cassava, the women have to do.

You will often see a great, big man walking ahead, with nothing in his hand but a cutlass (as they always carry that or a spear), and a woman, his wife, coming on behind, with a great big child on her back, and a load on her head. No matter how tired she is, her lord would not think of bringing her a jar of water, to cook his supper with, or of beating the rice; no, she must do that. A great big boy would not bring water for his mother; he would say: 'Boy no tote water; that be woman's work.'

If they live with missionaries, or Liberians, or anyone outside of their own native people, then they will do such things; but not for one another (Amanda Berry Smith, 17).

Smith's account is filled with the usual stories of heathenism, witchcraft and the darkness predicted for non-Christians. Within her narrative, her own ministering to the Bishop is not considered oppressive because the Bishop needed her services and the 'backward natives' were too ignorant to eat by the clock.

We used to get up in the morning early; I would boil some water and make the Bishop a cup of cocoa or coffee, and so give him an early break-

fast. The natives were always kind and hospitable; they would have their meal about nine or ten o'clock; but we would be very faint by that time, not being used to it; and, as the Bishop was a very early riser, I knew it was best for him to have something to eat before that time. And then I always took a cup of tea, or something it was late in the day... (17)

Nowhere in Smith's account does she stop to ask why the Bishop did not boil water for his own tea. The prevailing viewpoint is that of a missionary trained to detect and correct the wrong practices of the native; the missionary's major focus is the native's conversion. Smith's vocation enables her to see her chores for the Bishop as her duty and to defend the missionary ethic as objective truth. This leads the reader to believe that Smith's Africans sleep through the better part of the morning (they do not eat breakfast until nine or ten o'clock); and, their laziness requires missionary intervention as part of their redemption.

**U**nable to perceive herself as a returning native, Smith fails to see that the cutlass-carrying African male 'walking ahead' and his burdened wife are both victims of slave raids that required able-bodied African men to protect women and children from raiders of African bodies for the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Continued myopic reading of this African family caravan is based on the premise that armour-wearing and magnificent-white-horse-riding men are chivalrous, non-African inventions while cutlass or spear-carrying African men are primitive and oppressive. In other words, cutlass or spear-carrying men do not (cannot?) protect or rescue women or children in distress.

Undoubtedly, Smith recounts events that took place in the 19th century. But this way of looking at Africa is current. For example, in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), Netie is

both missionary and social critic in fictional Olinka and reflects prevalent US views of Africa and African women. Also, Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992) extends this burden of social criticism 'on-behalf-of' oppressed African womanhood into the area of activism in creative writing. According to the narrative objectives of Smith's and Walker's works, African women are either inherently incapable of seeing the extent of their own oppression or they lack necessary objectivity in their thoughts and writings about it. Among the works of African-born women writers, Buchi Emecheta's writings best exemplify this school of thought.

**T**his approach seeks to redirect the African woman toward a better way of life. It explores issues like the brutality of polygamy; the unreasonable expectations of mothers who cannot bear to see their daughters choose different lifestyles; the inability of the modern African woman to make up her mind about feminist ideas and attitudes and, of course, 'female genital mutilation' (Nama 1986; Levin 1986). It convinces by promising to 'put [African] women at the centre...' (O'Barr 59) and '...rais[e] consciousness... "through the" articulation (of) the inequities they experience in fictional form ...' (69). Using the consciousness raising approach, it evokes the need for a 'crucial union of westernized, feminist and African culture...' (Katherine Frank 19).

Crucial to this school of thought is the idea of the African woman's development into an independent individual. However, her independence requires the negation of African concepts of sharing and community because these tie the woman to tradition. It advocates a new kind of sharing (Frank 19) involving acceptance of the West and western feminist

ideals which signal conversion to a new equality. Significantly there is usually no suggestion to western women to share western cultural norms with African women or their own Africanized sisters.

Adherents to this school assume the African past is predictable and pernicious and they seem surprised at the African woman's inability to cope in a transitional society that lacks autonomy and access to self-validation mechanisms at the international level. Efforts to authenticate supportive traditional structures are interpreted as lack of creativity and incipient romanticism. Also problematic for the African woman involved in the conversion process is the identification of the contemporary African male as a 'modern' man who is nevertheless distinct from modern men.

**P**ublication in African languages is perceived as restricting access to African women's works, and the learning of a European language (preferably English) predicts resourcefulness. Typical of this approach, recommendations enjoin continued imposition of traditional constraints that control women's behaviour. Although usually engaged in issues of women's progress, the missionary feminist's analysis is unclear about which culture's constraints should guide behaviour; but it is never equivocal about the advantages of European language choices. Given the complex relationships between language and culture, the suggestion that local advancement is enhanced through publication in English (or other European languages) demands specific responses to the postcolonial experience.

Focusing attention on the perceptual distances created between African peoples by slavery and colonialism, this approach also maintains

a separatist vision that refuses to acknowledge African progress on both sides of the Atlantic. Its continuing evocation of Africa as the Dark Continent and indictment of people of the African diaspora as dreamers of unnecessary, if not impossible, dreams is a challenge to African and African diaspora scholarship, unity and advancement.

**G**iven this school's missionary focus, statements like 'African society's intolerance of one's right to choose one's destiny rather than consider the common good...' (Umeh 179) create a dilemma for the would-be African missionary feminist. Also when observations like the following are presented as admissions of limited feminist consciousness or indicators of retarded development, it becomes difficult to question these same assertions as valid indicators for the marginalization of African American women in advanced countries like the United States.

... the right path for [the women] is not clear as Mrs. Nwaizu . puts it  
'We are still a long way away from that yet. Here feminism means everything the society says is bad for women. Independence, outspokenness, immorality, all the ills you can think of.' (Umeh 176)

Whether it is the brutality of polygamy, African-descended women's rape and abuse in United States' slavery, or current ceilings on the African feminist's expectations, it will be difficult to use 'the master's tools [to] dismantle the master's house' (Lorde 1984). Despite our frustrations with history, all African-descended women are responsible for the development of research programmes that are sensitive to the unique locations we inhabit. In the final analysis, the missionary feminist's agenda does not proclaim the West as a haven for the educated, idealistic and tradition-free, modern African woman. That is the challenge

for all women of African descent. Contrary to this school of thought, the new African woman is not an unfinished version of the western feminist. If, as Audre Lorde implies, development does not depend on a western-based conversion agenda, then transcendence of current oppression must not mean that the contemporary African woman will be better off in a modified colonialism.

**N**eo-colonial Feminism: Colonialism's negation of African womanhood, the pervasive ambivalence regarding postcolonial thematic constructs, and the harsh realities of contemporary Africa's snail-paced economic progress – all pose unique problems for the development of research agenda on the African woman. Identifying locations for change and new methods of survival in the postcolonial state are the major focus of this school. Questioning the contemporary African woman's views of change, some concerns of this school overlap with those of missionary feminism; but some of the methods are similar to those employed by activist feminism.

This school points out the African woman's lack of development in sophisticated thought and action, insisting that adaptation to changing norms must be accompanied by attainment of power within the changing society. Changes in the domestic arena and the work place are emphasized. Rarely confrontational, neocolonialist feminism focuses on the African woman's sense of self, her identity. Consequently, the major targets are her feelings and knowledge of security in African constructions of knowledge.

This approach debunks articulations of traditional bases of the postcolonial woman's achievements (Brown 1981: 6) and makes her incapacity to exploit the resulting void

the reason for seeking advancement. Circumscribing her through the dismissal and exclusion of ideas that validate her points of origin, this school makes it difficult to develop contemporary economic and ideological markets that support the African woman's intellectual products.

Although neo-colonialist feminist thought acknowledges this underdeveloped market, it argues that the contemporary African woman's advancement depends on her removal from the supportive background of African ways of knowing. Rather than acknowledge that the western educated African has developed the capacity to straddle two or more cultures, neo-colonialist feminist thought maintains that such ability predicts the absence of a significant African worldview. This kind of argument precludes the possibility that pre-colonial African thought is receptive to ideas about women's autonomy, and concludes that feminism *per se* is foreign to the African woman's experience.

**A** major part of the neo-colonialist feminism's call to the African woman is predicated on the articulation of the absence of an autonomous viewpoint about women in the works of male authors. As a strategy, this approach encourages removal of the African woman from the African base by isolating women writers' works through the implication that their successes are beyond African men's.

Writers like Aidoo, Sutherland and Nwapa have made distinctive contributions to the genres in which they work – Aidoo in the short story, Sutherland in the play, and Nwapa in the novel. They have managed to develop their themes in such a way that their chosen forms are inseparable from the manner in which they perceive women and society in general. In each case, the selected form reflects

the experiences of the woman. Finally, Sutherland's plays repeatedly develop analogies between the role playing of the theatre and (sexual) role playing in society (13).

Thus, while the African woman writer's success facilitates her deletion from African society, it (re)creates her as an incident in western literature in Africa. The point here is that isolating the African woman from African society is at odds with African ways of knowing. Educated or not, African men, like men from other societies, constitute neither an autonomous cultural nor national alliance. Though it is not necessary that men and women always agree on all fronts, Africa's advancement is coextensive with the recognition of the existence of a common base, shared experiences and heritage.

It is important to state here that western feminism posits a different viewpoint, not a separate society, culture, politics and so on, from western patriarchal norms. In general, western feminism assumes the validity of woman-as-woman as it modifies western knowledge bases while validating women's positive participation. This fact is central to the different approaches that inform western (white) feminisms and the liberation struggles of women of colour in general and African women scholars in particular.

**A**frican Feminism: Most creative writers in postcolonial Africa assume the influence of an African narrative tradition and culture in their works. Although portrayals of the African woman's experiences reaffirm her position and power within African conceptions of the world, it has been difficult to delineate the utility of these relationships in the scripto-centric, new dispensation. Colonialism's early focus on writing as a male-dominated

activity created obstacles for the education of women and the early exploration of women-centred ways of knowing in the African knowledge base. This made it difficult to understand women's advancement in the changing society. African feminism explores the inscription of the African woman on the continent and the diaspora. Recognizing her circumscription in many areas of contemporary experience, it emphasizes the need for an extension of boundaries so as to facilitate validation of her participation as woman-as-woman. African feminism asserts the African woman's narrative and viewpoints as routes to understanding her experiences.

**A**frican feminism usually adopts an explanatory stance and emphasizes understanding of African cultures and social systems. Insisting on another way of reading Africa's written narratives, it assumes that the African story in a European language has more than one level of meaning. For example, in her exploration of Camara Laye's use of language, Phanuel Egejuru (1978) says:

... the author is defending the position of the African woman before an audience that has either misunderstood that position or has been ignorant of it. Camara does not need to prove this to an African audience. Furthermore the use of 'our' and 'we' shows that the author is distinguishing himself and his society from the foreign reader (141).

Also, in relation to writers in other parts of the world, the position of the African writer is unique on account of language and history. We have for the first time a group of writers committed to dualism of audience (241).

Explications by the African feminist school straddle general and encompassing views and close readings of selected texts (Egejuru 1976). Examination of particular texts and particular features of African ways

of knowing are more detailed in the works of scholars like Irene d'Almeida (1986), Mildred Hill-Lubin (1986), Nana Banyiswa-Horne (1986) and Charles Nama (1986).

This school of thought consciously reappropriates concepts of African womanhood retained in African American culture from slavery to the present as well as the different meanings of African womanhood within the traditional African knowledge base. African feminism insists on continued application of concepts which maintain a system of knowledge that assumed her visibility necessary for effective participation. Refusing to be relegated to the position of a congenial 'other' who endorses her own subjugation, African feminism asserts that current self-expression reinvigorates a sense of wholeness embedded in a viable past. Although it agrees with activist feminism on the necessity of developing an objective African feminist paradigm, it rejects its confrontational strategies that constrain exploration of pre-colonial Africa's constructions of knowledge to gender conflicts.

**I**n this regard, references to practical adjustments made by women of African descent using the African knowledge base in times of conflict are useful. For example, this school sees women like Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth as resisting and fighting disabling paradigms through the use of creative applications of African traditional assertions of women's inherent freedoms. The concept of harmonious coexistence is presumed at the core of the African knowledge base. For the contemporary African woman working within un-reconciled African and western systems of knowledge, the possibilities of this school of thought are endless.

As Wa Thiong'o notes early in

his career (Nama 141), the African woman's beauty 'in the tribe' must first be acknowledged by herself rather than by an alien, conflicting worldview. According to Dubois, inhabitants of that opposing worldview invariably 'look(s) on in amused contempt and pity' (DuBois 1903: 3) while the African struggles for self-assertion or moves toward self destruction or communal chaos. Clearly, convincing African literary critical and analytical strategies should have the potential to acknowledge and practice Africa's right to an all-inclusive heritage. This does not preclude learning from and/or borrowing from other cultures. But it requires constant revisions of multi-dimensional research programmes in search of underlying ideals and meaningful change.

**N**waononaku – an African Perspective on Womanhood: Although the African feminist approach remains sensitive to issues that are important to the contemporary African woman, it does not go far enough in its exploration. This is because it generally appraises her losses and proclaims her beauty through textual exploration of familiar postures like the fact of grandmother roles or the extended family in African societies. This approach creates an impression that in-depth explanations and/or analyses are not essential for developing viable analytical strategies when researching African women's life and literature. To a certain extent, this feature of African feminism creates a false universalism, which in turn creates difficulty in the initiation of new analytical frameworks to advance research and creativity using such explanations. While African feminist scholarship is brilliant, it primarily reflects prevailing interpretations and emphasize textual readings.

This work initiates a new app-



roach to the interpretation of the African experience by expanding the scope of relevant aspects of societal structure. Working from the assumption that before the African woman's voice was silenced through slavery and colonialism, it was heard within societal frameworks that assumed women's participation as significant to normal cultural practice. I also focus on the woman's position relative to other significant aspects of society. Regarding the question of silenced voices, for example, it seems logical to assume that the woman's voice in society reflected a position of relative and crucial power. Thus her power was based on established socio-political, religious and/or other norms. Careful examination of African literature engaged in the project of self-reclamation supports this claim.

In this work, I define women's writing as a pervasive text – it is written on the body with uli, on paper with the Europeans' indelible uli, and in the society in all aspects of life, i.e., as ubiquitous. For example, although the main character in Tutuola's *Palm-wine Drunkard* (1953) is a man who seems unconscious of either his plight or that of his people, he does not negate the lives of the women he encounters. Early in the story, he transforms himself into a lizard in order to discover the secret of restoring the voice of the beautiful woman who had chosen to marry 'the Skull as a complete gentleman' (25-26). Always, he shows concern for the women in his life and takes risks on their behalf.

For example, Achebe's Chielo (*Things Fall Apart*) is a priestess and a healer whose roles allow her control of spaces that the fearless Okonkwo is cautious about entering. Confident of these spaces and the social environment on a moonlit night, she runs through the town with a sick Ezimma

on her back. Throughout Chielo's race that night, her voice calls out greetings to notable community personages and *agbala*. Suggesting only confidence and reliance on a rich ideological resource base, Chielo's voice shows no hint of oppression or suppressed womanhood. The fact that Ezimma recovers after the encounter with Chielo also speaks about Chielo's power in *agbala*.

Significant to the re-envisioning of African womanhood here is the paradox of *agbala*. Always in collaboration with women, *agbala* is an oracle, a force beyond human understanding and strength. But it is also the name given to a man without a title (Achebe 1958). The brave Okonkwo trembles in the presence of the former and despises the latter. *Agbala* is an early indication of the woman's location in a traditional Igbo (African) society. In *Efuru* (1966) Flora Nwapa further expounds on the complexity of Igbo thought on women.

Rooted in Igbo narrative traditions, Nwapa does not refer directly to the Igbo practice of multi-voicing. Like Achebe, Nwapa also uses and explores the concept of duality-in-existence. Within the practice of duality in which everything has its opposite and complement, Nwapa, the narrator, names everything at least twice. To begin with, the traditional narrative mode assumes that narrative land exists as a complement to the world of the living. It is seen as a parallel universe whose world turns in ways similar to the world of the narrator and her/his audience. Consequently, whatever the narrative names is seen as parallel and complementary to that which is known at the concrete level.

Through narratives, community members name the contents of Spiritland, the complement of the world of

the living. Through symbolism and allusions, the narrator provides the route to and the proximity with Spiritland. These allusions and symbols are essential to the relationship with the community's ancestors and are indispensable to African life and living. The woman-as-mother is the primary narrator to the child. She teaches the child about the society's ways of knowing. In this way, the woman-as-mother becomes significant to the essential development and maintenance of the community. Chielo, racing through the town with Ezimma on her back symbolizes this role and function.

There is no male equivalent to this role of the priestess in African life. And, Okonkwo must follow later and wait in the shadows as woman-as-priestess and *agbala* renegotiate the child's health and continuance. Significant here is the fact that the processes of ritual and negotiation are embedded in narrative tradition and practice. Like Achebe, Nwapa makes use of this relationship in *Efuru* in which the major characters have praise names – the complement of given names. According to Achebe (1975: 96) names reflect the circumstances of one's birth and family background.

Nwapa's presentation of *Efuru* in her various roles and functions model traditional narrative practices and modes. On the first and most obvious level is *Efuru* (the lost one), the barren woman. As a childless woman, this character challenges the notion of Nneka – Mother-is-Supreme – a concept Achebe introduces in his exploration of Okonkwo's exile in Mbanta, his mother's home of birth. Agreeing with Achebe's articulation of duality-in-existence: Wherever something stands, something else will stand beside it, Nwapa presents a

character whose inability to be biologically prolific will pose a major dilemma expressed by Nneka: what happens when the woman is without child? Do women without children share in the power that motherhood endows on mothers in the society?

By the story's end, Nwapa solves the puzzle by presenting an Ugwuta-Igbo as a complement to childlessness—Uhamiri, the woman of the lake. For the disabled (because it suggests lack) condition of childlessness, the beautiful Uhamiri's abundant wealth provides an opposite and necessary complement. Efuru's wealth provides her an alternate avenue to motherhood. She uses it to take care of Ogea, Ogea's parents and others in the community who would otherwise have no access to the benevolent interventions associated with motherhood. Emerging from the intricate web of relationships is an Efuru whose praise name, Nwaononaku (the one-who-dwells-in-wealth), is manifested in an economically productive life. Efuru's effortless profits in the marketplace reflect an ideologically rich resource base, which the community supports using the Uhamiri metaphor.

Understanding womanhood as a discursive framework for explaining women's role in most African communities therefore requires epistemological specificity and historicity of African ways of knowing. The complementarities of paired-outcomes in Igbo (African) epistemology evident in Achebe and Nwapa's works sufficiently straddle the (pre) colonial and postcolonial contexts for understanding the woman's role in society. An approach that inheres from Igbo (African) thought, it allows for analytical depth whether or not the woman is biologically and/or economically prolific. By exploring essentially paired-outcomes within

the epistemological discourse, it becomes possible to explicate the necessity for women's participation.

In Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966), for example, Nwosu and Nwabata seek out Efuru who agrees to train and nurture their daughter, Ogea. Eventually, Efuru also begins to take care of Nwosu and Nwabata. Since Nwosu is Efuru's sister, existing African norms allow both to recreate Ogea as Efuru's maid as a way to alleviating misery and suffering for Nwosu who has lost his yams to flood. Nwapa's narrative project is purposefully based on Igbo thought and practice of conversation and rhetoric. Instead of proverbs, she uses conversation to revisit the issue of male death as an accepted form of payment for any death (Achebe 1958) by asserting the predominance of a mutual search for life.

Deriving her vision from Igbo narrative traditions, she stresses the extent to which Ikemefuna's death by Okonkwo's hand is inconsistent not only with Okonkwo's character but with Ugwuta (Igbo) thought and character. Structurally, Ogea's arrival in Efuru's household is introduced using a frame that is comparable to that which presents the arrival of Ikemefuna to Okonkwo's household. This structure signals Nwapa's purposeful use of Igbo rhetorical modes to engage Achebe's presentation of the use of male death to alleviate grief and misery:

That is how Ogea came to live with Efuru and her husband. She was a mere child, only ten years old. How could she look after a baby? Ogea cried and cried when her parents left her. She refused to eat and refused to do anything in the house. She was so uncooperative that Efuru did not know what to do with her. At first she was soft with her. But when she saw that this did not work, she became very firm and flogged her when she was naughty. Once or twice, she threatened to put pepper in her eyes (40).

Like Ikemefuna, Ogea brings folk tales, song and dance with her to her new home. Collectively, the women in Efuru's life nurture Ogea into a mature Oguta womanhood. Together with Efuru, Ogea learns about industry, success, joy and grief. Ogea moves with Efuru from one home to another. She observes and absorbs Oguta life and thought through Efuru's experiences in her marriages, life in her father's compound and her relationship with Uhamiri, the Woman of the Lake.

Unlike Okonkwo who eventually kills Ikemefuna, Efuru nurtures Ogea to eligibility for marriage to her husband, Gilbert. Ogea's social growth speaks to the amplitude of the structure of Igbo thought on the applicability of the concept of woman-as-female-and-principle to development in personal and community life and living. Rather than advocating polygamy, what is presented for consideration here is the potential for cooperation which women adapted and/or reworked for individual and group advancement.

Apprenticed to Efuru, Ogea can never be lost to Oguta womanhood. From this point of view, Nwapa's refusal to be labelled 'feminist' makes sense, for she is not arguing for equality between the male and female principle. That is already a given. What is important here is the (re)presentation of traditionally established strategies for continued exploration of routes to individual and group advancement. Even though they do occur, violence and violent deaths are not acceptable conclusions within this structure in which simultaneous existence of the corporeal and the intangible is a norm. Most African societies continually strive for harmony between the ancestral world and the world of the living. Creating or maintaining rifts between

these two worlds is considered an abomination in most African cultures.

In this regard, Ghana's Ama Ata Aidoo's fictional and analytical works examine similar ideas. In *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (1965), she explores some of these concepts through complications arising from the introduction of the returning native, Eulalie, Ato's Afro-American wife. Like most African women in contemporary African women's literature, Eulalie is portrayed in the complex environment of the African family. Part of the question Aidoo explores here is: How do those who stayed behind explain African norms about family to those whose ancestors went away and became a part of western norms and values? Also, significant to the situation in *The Dilemma* ... is that the Ghana in question is new to all the characters. In the new dispensation, the negotiations and transitions are no longer smooth as everyone strives for harmony, full participation and recognition.

**T**he women participate in the restructuring process. Esi Kom invests all her family's wealth in the possibilities of the new dispensation by paying for her son's education in the United States. Later, when Ato brings Eulalie home, she finds out that Ato had neglected to tell his wife about basic processes of maintaining continuity and harmony through hospitality. Ato's wife throws away her mother-in-law's gift of snails because she had never 'seen a single snail crawling on the streets of New York. And seeing snails and eating them are entirely different things!' (32) She also does not offer her mother-in-law drinking water or an invitation to spend a night or two at her home.

Esi Kom and Monka insist on a discussion of the situation. During the discussion, the women maintain control of the discussion, which quickly

develops into a quarrel. It soon becomes obvious that Esi Kom had pawned family land and other heirlooms to pay for Ato's education. In the process, she had neglected Monka's needs. Esi and Monka indicate that they had hoped Ato's return would enable their family to rise again to their former status. Although the women are both angry, they refuse to be relegated to the background, insisting that Ato listen to them. But listening does not always mean understanding.

**A**to continues to misrepresent his people's tradition through his silence. By telling Eulalie not to worry when she expresses anxiety about having children, Ato refuses to be a narrator in the African tradition. But his silence and inaction are only evident when his leadership role in the Odumna Clan house is at issue. Ato does not hesitate to assert himself when Eulalie realizes that the elders expected them to have children and confronts him. He slaps her, expressing the growing gulf between him and the female principle in particular and members of the Odumna Clan house in general.

Aidoo's narrative vision brings together the old and the new, insisting that the new dispensation need not be a negative experience for Africans, especially women. Using female characters from both sides of the African experiences of enslavement and colonialism, Aidoo's carefully crafted narrative project asserts that the female principle can be used to heal the chasm between the old and the new, the educated elite of the new dispensation and the uneducated traditional leaders. Especially instructive is the narrative's suggestions about the process of healing the rift that resulted between Africans as a result of the experiences of slavery in the New World and colonial domination on the continent.

At the end of the story, a tired and weak Eulalie returns to the Clan House, which she left in anger after the fight with Ato. As she is about to 'crumple in front of the courtyard,' (52) Esi Kom who had found out that Eulalie's mother was dead, 'rushes forward to support her on' (52). She steers her daughter-in-law 'through the door that leads into the old house' (52). Given that Esi Kom had earlier mined old family wealth to pay for her son's education in the West, it is likely that given the new circumstances, she will go in search of traditional wisdom to enable Eulalie's socialization into the family.

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# Feminist knowledge

CHARMAINE PEREIRA

THIS paper focuses on the intellectual and political project of feminism, its place within the field of women's studies and its implications for knowledge production in contemporary Nigeria. Women's studies, as a forum for creating knowledge through women-centred research, analysis, theoretical and methodological development, has by now established a virtually worldwide presence.

There is a certain degree of overlap between gender and women's studies since studies carried out under the umbrella of women's studies may use a relational perspective that incorporates the social relations of gender. At the same time, gender studies in Africa have been primarily studies about women, rather than men, as a gendered group (see Mama 1996a).

Given that women's realities are shaped by multiple social hierarchies that include gender as well as class, ethnicity, religion, age, race and so on, it does not automatically follow that an emphasis on gender will *necessarily* include an analysis of class and other social divisions. Indeed, one of the central arguments of the critique of western feminism by Black feminists in the U.K. and feminist women of colour in the U.S., was that western feminism was preoccupied with inequalities arising on the basis of gen-

der relations, to the exclusion of race, class and other dimensions of social inequality (see e.g., Carby 1982, Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981).

The discourse of feminism has raised a lot of controversy and is viewed with considerable suspicion in Africa, on the grounds that it is 'alien and western'. The selective nature of this interpretation is clearly manifest in the sense that some 'western' phenomena, such as 'modernisation', are viewed as acceptable, whereas other 'western' phenomena, such as 'feminism', are not. It is nevertheless true that many African women and men, in Nigeria as in other parts of the continent, are highly reticent about identifying themselves with feminism, even if they are actively working for women. In the last ten years or so, however, many African women who may not have felt comfortable calling themselves feminists earlier have been rethinking that position. The tendency has been either to talk in terms of African feminism or to use other terms like womanism (see Tsikata 1997).

In Europe and North America, feminist research and the production of feminist theory have grown out of an organic connection between feminism in the academy and women's movements (see e.g., Roberts 1996). In Africa, the same connection does not exist in quite the same way, and women's studies in the region appears to be charting its own distinct course (Mama 1996a).

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In the wake of the United Nations Decade for Women (1975-1985), the marginalisation of the vast majority of women in African societies became a matter of serious concern. It was during this period that the discourse of 'Women in Development' (WID) was articulated. Significant features of WID were its avoidance of any confrontational stance regarding patriarchy and capitalism, arguing instead for women's 'integration into development'. Whilst WID has provided the rhetoric for mobilising women in support of development, the reality was more akin to the mobilisation of women in support of state interests, with women's autonomously defined interests written out of the agenda (see e.g., Manuh 1993; Pereira forthcoming).

**T**he WID paradigm has been severely criticised by feminist scholars for its assumption that women have not been contributing to development. The reality is that women's work has been ignored and devalued whilst the diverse ways in which development strategies themselves have contributed to women's marginalisation and oppression have been denied (Sen and Grown/DAWN 1988).

The WID paradigm has since been superseded by the GAD (Gender and Development) paradigm, which ostensibly pays more attention to the social relations between women and men and their implications for development. Despite its apparent differences, the GAD paradigm shares some common themes with WID, including the combination of arguments for gender justice with those of economic efficiency. One of the consequences is a tendency towards instrumentalism when addressing problems arising from women's subordination and exploitation: 'gender' receives attention only to the extent

that it facilitates more efficient development (Razavi and Miller 1995).

In 1977, the Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD) was formed, a landmark event in which African feminist scholars collectively registered their institutionalised presence. The aim was to facilitate research and activism by African women scholars, and thereby articulate the agenda of feminism in Africa. Workshops on methodology, women and rural development, reproduction, the mass media and development assistance were held early on in AAWORD's existence, up to the early 1990s (e.g., AAWORD 1983, 1985). In more recent years, however, the organisation has not been as effective in bringing together the increasing number of African women scholars engaged in gender and women's studies.

**W**hilst not all work carried out under the rubric of gender and women's studies is feminist, there is a growing tendency amongst some scholars in the field to define their orientations as explicitly feminist. Nevertheless, the interests served by most studies of African women have rarely been those of African women themselves, being more often those of authoritarian regimes in search of legitimacy, or those of donor agencies serving an externally-defined agenda. High-profile WID programmes, such as the Better Life Programme of the Babangida regime in Nigeria, cannot be conflated with a women's movement, any more than WID activities can be confused with women's studies.

In her postscript to the anthology *Engendering African Social Sciences*, Mama (1997a: 423-4) points out that:

If present trends continue, deradicalised studies of women, gender studies, gender plan-

ning and gender analysis all have more prospect of gaining acceptance in the African academic establishment than the overtly feminist and movement-linked variants of women's studies.

In view of Nigeria's political history of prolonged military rule and authoritarian civilian rule, the need for the social sciences to address the weight of this history on the oppressive structures and practices of contemporary society is particularly acute. Military rule, apart from coercive incursions into the political and economic arenas, has involved ideological struggles for hegemony in the face of crises of legitimacy. Overlapping legacies of authoritarianism have resulted in psychological and cultural domination and underdevelopment, to varying degrees. In this context, it is incumbent on the social sciences to nurture a counter-hegemonic project of the Gramscian variety (Gramsci 1971). This would be a task of renewal, characterised by a critical and creative approach to knowledge production that will transform ways of thinking, forms of practice and the nature of political projects (Hall 1991). Such an approach would take account of multiple dimensions of oppression, exploitation and subordination, for women as well as for men, and the resistance to such oppression.

**T**his paper is intended as a contribution to this larger project of renewal and transformation of the social sciences, focusing as it does on the implications of feminism for knowledge production in Nigeria. There are three sections to the paper. The first addresses the politics of knowledge production from the perspective of (mostly male-oriented) resistance to feminism in the academy. The second provides an outline of the relations between feminist struggles and nationalism in Africa, with a view to highlighting women's presence in political history

as feminists and key players in nationalist struggles. In the third section, I draw attention to specific themes that constitute challenges to the development of feminist theory and scholarship in Nigeria.

**F**eminism and The Politics of Knowledge Production: Feminist scholarship embodies a political commitment to women's liberation and social transformation in the direction of egalitarianism in gender relations and social justice. Feminist research embodies this commitment not only in terms of *what* kind of knowledge is produced but also *how* it is produced.

The Charter of the Social Sciences Council of Nigeria notes that while 'The distinctive characteristic of the natural sciences is the universality of their content, bound neither by time nor space' (Article 1.1, p. 1), in contrast, 'The study of society is less amenable to the scientific rigours alluded to above' (Article 1.2, p. 1). Yet the deployment of arguments relating to 'scientific objectivity' in the social sciences in Africa has been selective in a way that is clearly gendered.

Critiques of imperialism and capitalism have been quite explicit about their political implications, viewing these as positive rather than reprehensible features. 'Objectivity' has neither dominated the discussion nor figured as an issue to be prioritised in such circumstances. When it comes to feminism, however, the political implications of feminist critiques of patriarchy are deplored on the grounds that they 'lack scientific rigour and objectivity!'

The contradictory character of male intellectuals' arguments against feminism takes a number of forms, as Fatou Sow's discussion (1997: 33-4) reveals:

One can be an African intellectual, discuss democracy, refer to Plato and the Greek city, talk about the spirit of Montesquieu's laws, perform an exegesis on Marx's texts via Trotsky or Althusser; in short, show off a high level of western culture with nothing but a proud frame of mind. ... the debate will qualify as scientific, academic, political, ideological, never western. The African woman intellectual is accepted among the initiated, as long as she conforms to and deepens the dominant discourse. Ever since the 'inapplicability' of women's issue (sic) was first suggested, the critics have cried: cardinal sin of feminism; persecution myth; lack of scientific rigour and objectivity; mimicry and westernisation; reinforcement of the West's racist perception; negation of culture and loss of African identity; re-investigation of the traditional distribution of social roles; illegitimacy of the right to speak on behalf of other women, particularly rural, illiterate, poor ... In all, women have only themselves to blame if they are oppressed.

'Objectivity' and 'scientific rigour' are clearly only the subtext in this particular duel of the sexes. At least three gendered sets of contradictions can be identified in the above passage, where the applicability of arguments varies depending on whether it is women or men who are the referents. These include the contradiction over which 'western' perspectives are acceptable and which are not; the contradiction over which issues it is necessary to be 'objective' about; and the contradiction over which issues can be acceptably constructed as 'political'.

**T**he existence of these contradictions reveals the extent to which the struggle is only nominally one of 'rigour'. More substantively, it is one of power and points to the strength of the threat presented by feminism, as perceived by various categories of men. This threat coalesces around the possibility of relinquishing privileges that men currently take for granted or relinquishing the control that they exert over women. These two threats are fundamentally related, since it

is through the control of women's labour, mobility, sexuality and fertility that many masculinist privileges are derived.

**W**e can see that the politics of feminist knowledge production and resistance to it are shaped by an array of factors that are not necessarily rational and therefore not always conscious. Hutchful (1997: 214) points to the force of the 'masculine imagination' in deriving contrasting symbolisms of women.

The first is the notion of women's spirituality (derived in part from her symbolic closeness to nature and the Earth ...) which may be used for good or evil supernatural acts (such as witchcraft), and the turmoil associated with her sexual power. This coexists with a second—and almost directly opposed—vision of woman that may be termed the 'Good Mother Complex', which idealises women (unlike men) as unsullied, close to home and children, and therefore renders women's criminality and fall from grace particularly heinous.

Manifestations of Hutchful's 'Good Mother Complex' have been analysed by a number of authors. The overt violence of colonial regimes across the African continent, which included the widespread abuse of women alongside the strengthening of the interests of male despots, was predicated on a more benevolent underside. This was the side that sought to domesticate and so incorporate a small minority of African women as wives of African male administrators in the colonial state.

This selective incorporation went hand-in-hand with the exclusion of the vast majority of African women from all political and administrative structures and from the wage economy that was overtaking precolonial modes of production (Mama 1997b). Pittin (1991) points out that in contemporary Nigeria, development programmes, education policy and the control over female sexuality affirm

the notion that state policy and ideology in relation to women is preoccupied with the domestication of women.

**O**pposing the construction of the 'Good Mother Complex' is that of the power of women, whether derived from women's sexuality or their spirituality (Hutchful 1997: 214). What Hutchful calls the 'defensive fragility' of the masculine gender is forged out of a struggle against women's perceived 'dark natures'. This often takes the form of continuously affirming gender roles and prohibitions against gendered transgressions on the part of men as well as women. Outside the academy, women's material success in business, unlike that of men's, is often viewed as a result of this turbulent and untamable nature. Alternatively, it may be constructed as a result of the corruption of men—evidence of magic and criminality. Men's outbursts against the visibility of some categories of women, in the face of the intensification of economic crises, are reinforced by the actions of military state agencies and other sources of authority, such as religious authorities (Dennis 1987, Pittin 1991).

The notorious War Against Indiscipline of the Buhari regime is one of the better-known examples of state terrorism, targeting as it did street hawkers, beggars, homeless people and specific categories of women whose presence and activities were constructed as a 'cause' of the nation's crises (Dennis 1987). Furthermore, linkages between state power and religious ideology were evident in the Kano State Petty Trading Control (Amendment) Edict of 1988, which banned hawking by girls under 16 years of age. The decree was intended to 'protect young female children ... from moral danger and exploitation.' This it did by arresting the girls them-

selves and bringing them to court, not by sanctioning and removing the men who abuse young girls. Praise for Kano state policy was clothed in the form of Muslim morality, thus legitimising the ideology of the control of women and girls (Pittin 1991).

Against this background, it does not require too great a leap of the imagination to understand the threat posed by feminism to diverse categories of men in the academy as the threat of liberating women's 'dark natures' and therefore, encouraging the release of women's 'deviant' or 'magical' powers. Any increased visibility of women in the structures of higher education, however marginal and distant from the centres of decision-making, is likely to intensify male insecurity and bouts of misogyny.

At the same time, the ability of anti-feminist men to contain the threat posed by the existence of even the apolitical varieties of gender and women's studies is circumscribed by the force of the priority given to women and issues of gender by international donor agencies. The predominance of such agencies in the funding of research is assured (for the time being at least) by the twin processes of state neglect on the one hand, and mismanagement by university authorities on the other. In this scenario, the resistance to feminism within the academy is unlikely to simply disappear.

**F**eminism and Nationalist Struggles: In view of the dismissal of feminism as an 'alien' and 'western' construct, the question of what relations actually existed between feminism and other struggles in Africa is of tremendous significance. This question has been most often addressed in terms of the relations between feminism and nationalist struggles in the region. The historical context of African women's struggles

has been one shaped forcefully by the continent's experience of imperial domination.

The atrocities committed in the name of colonialism's 'civilising mission' and the ensuing destruction of lives, particularly in southern Africa, have meant that under national reconstruction, women's demands have frequently been for the basic means of existence.

**W**omen's survival, in the wake of the unravelling of national economies, has often rested upon gaining access to basic amenities for themselves and their families. As such, their struggles have been not only a response to the oppressive features of their own societies but also a fight against the imposition of western norms. As Roberts (1985) points out, the alienness of such concepts is conspicuous when abstracted from their cultural base and there is a long history of African women's resistance to their imposition, for example through tax riots.

In Nigeria, the Aba Women's War in 1929 is one of the better known examples of women's mass protest but it was not the only occurrence of its kind (Mba 1982). Moreover, the feminist character of the Women's War was clearly manifested, as Mba (1982:91) indicates:

The women's war was very much a feminist movement in the sense that the women were very conscious of the special role of women, the importance of women to society, and the assertion of their rights as women vis-à-vis the men.

Feminist struggle in Africa, as indeed in Asia, has been most visible in contemporary research on anti-colonialist and nationalist struggles, in projects of national liberation (see Jayawardena 1986). Across Africa, women have engaged in such struggles in varying ways (see e.g., Likimani 1985, Urdang 1989, McClintock 1991, Lazreg 1994). The



Algerian and Zimbabwean cases are just two of the most notable of such instances, where despite women's active engagement in wars of national liberation, post-war gender relations have been significantly unmarked by egalitarian transformation. Moreover, subsequent recognition of the salience of men and women's involvement in national liberation struggles has been selective and marked by double standards. In relation to Mau Mau in Kenya, O'Barr (1985) points out that although women operated as civic as well as sexual beings in their nationalist activities, their civic contributions have been minimised.

**T**he intertwining of feminism and nationalism in Africa has had a number of implications. One of these is that women's movements have generally not been autonomous, but rather offshoots of male-dominated political structures. In such circumstances, the pronouncements of the head of the party or the head of state, have been very influential. Women themselves have been reluctant to address issues of feminism and women's liberation outside the terms of national liberation. In African states professing socialism, the path to women's liberation has been viewed as requiring no separate struggle since socialist strategy will, in and of itself, liberate women (Roberts 1985). The official view was, as Samora Machel put it in his speech to the First Conference of Mozambican Women in 1973:

Let us be clear on this point. the antagonistic contradiction is not found between man and woman, but rather between women and the social order, between all exploited women and men, and the social order (cited in Roberts 1985: 183).

In this way, male nationalists denied the significance of gender relations, gender conflict and the historical contributions of feminism to socialist theory and practice.

The denial of the significance of gender conflict by male nationalists is clearly evident in the denouncement of feminism as both 'divisive' and 'imperialist'. Such a position has to be located in the context of a masculinist conception of nationalism generally, and political agency specifically (see Enloe 1989). Women who try to argue otherwise are often treated with contempt:

in spite of evidences [of African women's traditional power] which are supported by oral traditions and social structures, present attempts by African women to recover equality and freedom are ridiculed by male power and interpreted as a mere 'mechanistic mimesis' and as contamination from the West (Baffoun 1985 4)

For women who were active in national liberation movements, this has the effect of rendering invisible a strong history of resistance to local and imperialist patriarchies.

The political differences among diverse strands of feminism and the question of how women in different sociocultural and historical locations formulate their relations to feminism are of immense significance. The reticence of many African women to identify themselves as feminists has been referred to earlier. It is only recently, in South Africa, that profound changes in the discourse on feminism have emerged. These have arisen primarily as a result of Black women's greater visibility within the mass democratic movement and their moulding of the term 'feminism' to meet their specific historical needs and situation (see McClintock 1991). All this highlights the very real need for reflection and research on the relations between feminism and women's movements, and the implications for the production of feminist knowledge.

**C**hallenges to the Development of Feminist Theory in Nigeria: The feminist agenda in women's studies entails

the production of knowledge that would empower women in the struggle for their liberation in the context of social transformation. In Nigeria, the early development of women's studies appears to have been linked to a feminist agenda. Individual scholars have used conferences on curriculum development in their disciplines, or fora for the discussion of 'women and development', to raise questions about the nature of women's studies, its problems, its relevance and methods for the dissemination of the knowledge acquired.

Seminars in the 1980s held at the University of Ibadan, addressed the state of the art in Nigeria as well as theoretical and methodological issues in comparative perspective. Women's studies itself has been growing rapidly in the country since the 1980s. The concrete realities of women's lives and their experiences, their struggles, the socio-cultural and political constraints facing women, have all become the subject of research and debate (Awe 1996).

**Y**et a great deal still remains to be done. The uneven extent to which women's studies has been pursued in different parts of the country, being more prevalent in the south than in the north, is one example. The lack of balance in coverage of the country is exacerbated by inadequacies in networking and poor efforts to disseminate information. As a result, Nigerian scholars tend to work in isolation from one another (Awe 1996).

In recognition of these and other problems, the Network for Women's Studies in Nigeria (NWSN) was formed, amidst great enthusiasm, following the workshop, 'Setting an Agenda for Gender and Women's Studies in Nigeria'. The workshop, held at the British Council, Kaduna in January 1996, recognised that gender

and women's studies have had a long history in Nigeria.

**A**t the same time, participants expressed a great need for a national forum in which the state of the art could be appraised, experience exchanged and future plans developed. In doing so, the aim would be to initiate a process through which Nigerian women scholars would be able to set the agenda themselves for the development of gender and women's studies locally. This process would, at the same time, be situated in an awareness of African and global contexts. Many of the themes highlighted by the international network DAWN<sup>1</sup> – the need for research, curriculum development and networking – were reflected in the discussions at the inaugural workshop leading to the formation of NWSN.

The level of awareness about women's subordination has to be raised through popular culture, the media and formal and informal education... The role of women's studies in this process is important. We already know that research into our history, networking among scholars, and curriculum development are vital aids to raising our own consciousness, as well as that of men. But women's studies in the Third World cannot stay in the academy. Because large segments of our people are still illiterate or unused to the printed word (and this is even more true for women than for men), we need to concentrate on techniques for popular and mass education. This is where the methods learned in the 'pedagogy of the oppressed' can be useful, and where local organisations can again play a crucial role (Sen and Grown/DAWN 1988: 88)

I have identified a number of challenges to the development of feminist theory, drawn from two examples of practice involving links between the academy and women-centred organisations. This focus has been informed by the needs identified by participants at the Network's first two workshops: more grounded theory in gender and women's studies (Mama

1996b) and greater exposure to the debate over feminism in Africa (Pereira 1997).

My first example concerns the organisation Women in Nigeria (WIN) which has branches in most states of the federation. In its early days, WIN's membership was drawn primarily from the university community, although in some states, its membership was more broad based. As an activist organisation, WIN carries out 'research, policy-making, dissemination of information, and action, aimed at improving the conditions of women,' recognising both class and gender as sources of oppression and exploitation of women and (some) men (WIN Constitution, p. 1).

**T**he organisation works for women but is constituted of men as well as women. This example draws on the processes that preceded the dispute in WIN over the choice of theme for the 1991 annual conference. In the vote for the theme to be selected, men and women within the organisation were divided, men voting for the theme 'Women and the Economy' with a vote of about 20:6 whilst women chose the theme 'Women and Violence' with a vote of 16:4. The timing of the vote, late at night, favoured men's attendance disproportionately, thus acting in their favour.

The correspondence in WIN's newsletter, between Ayesha Imam (1990/91) and Chom Bagu (1991), covered a number of issues salient to women's organising and the production of knowledge. These include gender politics within the organisation, the significance of female leadership in WIN, the need for men to be sensitive to domains of masculine privilege and, not least, perspectives on violence against women.

Internationally, the question of the validation of women's experi-

ences as a means of conscientisation and empowerment, and therefore the relationship between experience and knowledge, has been keenly debated in women's movements and organisations. Whilst the concept of 'difference' succeeds in highlighting the diversity of women's experiences and social locations, it has been less successful in focusing attention on issues to do with hierarchy and power (Maynard 1996). Accordingly, I have chosen to highlight the theme of experience as a basis for knowledge, which Ayesha uses to justify women's selection of violence as the more appropriate choice of conference theme.

There are some issues on which women, because of their subordinate position within male biased gender relations, know better what issues (sic) need to be dealt with. They know better on these issues because they suffer directly from gender subordination (or are in a position where they are likely to do so) while men do not and can only be sympathetic and empathetic. Men who are sensitive to and aware of women's oppression understand and accept this – recognising that sometimes they must follow and not insist on taking the lead in defining what is important.<sup>2</sup>

Bagu's (1991: 8) response was to refer to the partial nature of experience as a basis for knowledge:

From a theoretical point of view, the Ayesha position is rather empiricist – that only those who have direct experience can have genuine knowledge. If this were true and Ayesha knows, all the social revolutions in history would not have taken place. The experience of social oppression can come in several ways. In an organisation like WIN, there is no way all members can have the same experience of all aspects of oppression. It should also be realised that class and gender feelings and sentiments are not instinctive, they derive from social consciousness. That is why not all members of a class and gender support the cause and struggle or the programmes of their gender or class. This is really elementary.

It is true that the argument that only those who have direct experience can have genuine knowledge, is an

1. Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN).

2. Imam 1990/91.

empiricist argument. On its own, it is a relatively weak point in Ayesha's argument. Experience alone is always partial and needs to be understood in its structural context, given that multiple dimensions of difference constitute an integral feature of the experience of diverse categories of women (Brah 1992). Ayesha's position would have been stronger if she had made two further points, in addition to the experiential argument. The first would be to make a connection between women's experience and women's interests (by no means a straightforward connection, and one that I think needs further analysis). The second argument would be to refer to the *commonalities in women's interests* in eliminating violence against women from society, regardless of their *actual experiences of violence*, and the *differences in those experiences*.

**B**agu's response to Imam ridiculed the weakness in her argument and treated it as a challenge to his right to interpretive authority, that is, the right to *interpret* and give meaning to experience. Rather than accepting that women in WIN had the right to insist on being heard (as opposed to literally being shouted down, as happened at the 1990 AGM), Bagu seemed to view Imam's criticism as automatically implying *competition* over authority. Lewis (1993: 541) makes the above point about interpretive authority in relation to South African women and the divisions that exist among women on the basis of race. Contingent upon this is the notion that ' "legitimate" knowledge is the rightful possession of a specific group,' in Lewis' case, white South African women. She argues further that the displacement of race as a real basis of conflict among women has weakened the growth of feminist theory.

The implications for feminist theory in Nigeria are clear: a lack of attention to the social bases of conflict such as age, ethnicity, religion, in addition to class, can only weaken the growth of feminist theory. The WIN example above is significant precisely because it is gender that is the basis of conflict. In the context of women's general reluctance to address the existence of gender conflict in scholarship and in activism, there is a serious lesson to be learned.

**M**y second example is drawn from the work of the International Reproductive Rights Research Action Group (IRRRAG), Nigeria. The research project was part of a seven country study that spanned Brazil, Egypt, Malaysia, Mexico, the Philippines and the USA, in addition to Nigeria. IRRRAG Nigeria was set up in 1993 to investigate the meanings of reproductive rights in diverse cultural settings, with a view to giving a voice to marginalised groups of women. Internationally, struggles for women's reproductive health and rights have been carried out in the context of building 'an internationally recognised legal framework for the universal defence of women's autonomy, bodily integrity and personhood' (Correa with Reichmann 1994: 56). Central to this framework is the use of (apparently gender neutral) human rights instruments to fight abuses of women's rights, hence the slogan 'Women's rights are human rights' (see Awe 1994).

IRRRAG Nigeria's multi disciplinary team incorporated expertise on reproductive health, law, community development, sociology, anthropology, education, feminist research and women organising. The team members were all long standing women's rights activists and the coordinators (three zonal and one national)

had all served in different ways in the leadership of Women In Nigeria (WIN). Indeed, overlapping membership of a range of women's organisations was a notable feature of the team composition. Whilst this facilitated the establishment of the team through the use of existing networks, it was also indicative of the relatively small number of activists committed to research in the area (Osakue et al. 1995).

**I**t is perhaps partly as a result of the coordinators' and other members' experiences in WIN (specifically, the processes preceding the 1991 AGM, discussed in my first example) that the place of men in the research work was explicitly considered. Two men were involved as researchers, in ways that were important but not central to the research – coding of responses, taking notes during focus group discussions (FGD) sessions and report writing. Men were involved in the research partly so that the team could proceed with their efforts to further sensitise men to the issues of women's reproductive rights:

It may be interesting to note at this point that the latter objective was realised if the spirited arguments that punctuated our discussions during the report writing session is (sic) something to go by (Osakue et al. 1995: 56).

However, there were some parts of the research that men were consciously excluded from, such as the sensitive and intimate in-depth interviewing process, for which it would be inappropriate to use male researchers. Moreover, men were not included as research participants in the group sessions for two reasons. The first is their tendency to dominate in terms of vocal expression; the second is the effect of the presence of men on women, who tend to give less truthful and more 'pleasing' responses (Osakue et al. 1995).

At the same time, there is a need to recognise that women and men are 'bound up in a web of conflictual and cooperative relationships' (Razavi and Miller 1995: 37). Most women, as members of households, view their interests as being tied up with those of other household members, especially their children. It is within and across webs of relationships characterised by varying degrees of cooperation and conflict that women's reproductive health and rights will be realised. Feminist theory needs to pay greater attention to the nature of such complexities and contradictions, in order to arrive at more nuanced understandings of the implications for women's agency, whether expressed individually or collectively.

**T**he need to recognise and reaffirm the centrality of feminism to women's studies in Nigeria has been a central argument in this paper. The context in which women's studies has developed nationally is one in which the emphasis on women, whilst linked to women's struggles internationally, has also emanated profoundly from the concerns of the development industry and state projects of authoritarian rule. Whilst not all work carried out under the rubric of women's studies is feminist, there is a growing tendency amongst some academics in the field to define their orientations as explicitly feminist. The intellectual and political project of feminism underlies the production of knowledge about women, for women, through the transformation of social relations in the direction of gender equity and social justice. Such initiatives are deserving of greater support than they currently receive in the hostile terrain of male-dominated academia.

The reluctance of most scholars in mainstream social science to engage seriously with feminism is

evident in a number of defensive postures. The most common of these includes dismissing feminism as 'alien' and 'western', despite the existence of Nigerian feminist intellectual work. Such tactics also display a selective reading of political history, in which African women, as feminists, have been key players in nationalist struggles. The variety of forms of feminism have to be understood in their historical, social and political contexts before they can be dismissed in such an unscholarly and cavalier fashion.

It is clear that the obstacles and resistances that feminism in the academy is faced with need to be understood more clearly with a view to addressing the backlash against feminism, which may well intensify in the near future. At the same time, we are currently witnessing the opportunistic take-up of women's studies and the more neutral-sounding 'gender studies' by hitherto disinterested male individuals and male-dominated institutions. In the absence of any liberatory agenda for women, such trends reflect the demise of integrity and agendas of social transformation in academia, as in the body politic.

**T**he knowledge generated by mainstream social science in Nigeria, as elsewhere, has been about a male world created by and for men, with women occupying marginal if not deviant positions, when they have been treated as objects (and not subjects) of knowledge. Such partial knowledge cannot serve to furnish adequate understanding of the society we live in or the problems it currently faces. The possibility of women generating autonomous, not necessarily separatist, spheres of knowledge that may be used to change the prevailing order has yet to be taken on board.

For the social sciences in Nigeria to face the challenges of feminist

knowledge would require a deep-rooted project of transformation: a transformation of what counts as knowledge and the institutions within which knowledge production takes place. Such a project would not simply make token references to feminist theory and methodology but would require asking different questions, requiring new conceptualisations about wider realities that include women as well as men. A counter-hegemonic project of this nature implies not only the regeneration of the academy but of culture, social relations and political consciousness, not least in ourselves.

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# Books

**CITIZEN AND SUBJECT: Decentralised Despotism and the Legacy of Late Colonialism** by Mahmood Mamdani. Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997.

*My Traitor's Heart* by Rian Malan is probably one of the more honest and troubled books to come out of post-colonial South Africa. Malan, an Afrikaner, descendant of the 'father' of apartheid as also the first prime minister of 'independent' South Africa, explores a dilemma marking the liberal, white South African: How commensurable are the worlds of the white European and the native, indigenous black African? For someone who began as a conscientious objector against apartheid, not just the political arrangements but the philosophical presuppositions, he ends by indicating the near impossibility of the white liberal ever entering into and understanding the world of the black native.

Malan's experience drew him towards a conclusion akin to the 'separate but equal' theory popular in a strand of multiculturalism which stresses that the two worlds are different, constituted by different principles, and that there is no meeting point. Not unexpectedly, the book generated howls of protest from those favouring the language of rights and equal citizenship. Malan was also accused of being ahistorical and romantic.

One route to unpacking the dilemma exemplified by Malan is provided in Mahmood Mamdani's scholarly yet engaged tract, *Citizen and Subject*. Mamdani examines contemporary Africa to argue that, 'The legacy of late colonialism created a bifurcated world inhabited by subjects on the one hand and citizens on the other, their lives regulated simultaneously by customary and modern law, their beliefs dismissed as pagan but bearing the status of religion; in sum, the world of the "savage" barricaded from the world of the "civilized".'

He traces Africa's present predicament to two clear tendencies: modernist and communitarian, one liberal and the other seeking a return to the source. For modernists the problem of Africa can be traced to the inadequate development of civil society; for the communitarians it is that the communities (tribes) that comprise the 'real' Africa are marginalised from public life. 'One side calls for a regime that will champion rights; the other stands in defence of culture.'

Mamdani problematises both positions and attempts to locate both the language of rights and of

culture in a historical and institutional context by examining how power is organised and how it tends to fragment resistance in contemporary Africa. In the context of South Africa, he begins with Smuts, who while sharing the incipient racism of his race and class, was keen not just to control the natives, but to evolve an institutional mechanism that would not 'de-Africanize the African and turn him either into a beast of the field or into a pseudo-European.' If 'Africa is to be redeemed' so as to 'make her own contribution to the world,' then 'we will have to proceed on different lines and evolve a policy that will not force her institutions into an alien European mould' but 'will preserve her unity with her own past' and 'build her future progress and civilization on specifically African foundations.'

Thus began the system of 'institutional segregation', different from 'territorial segregation'. The problem with the latter was that it presumed institutional homogenization. While natives may be territorially separated from whites, their institutions were giving way to an alien institutional mould, most evident in the presence of native immigrants in white society.

The solution was sought in permitting only the male to migrate into white areas as labour, forcing the families to stay behind in 'native provinces' marked by communal ownership under tribal self-rule. 'The way to stabilize racial domination (territorial segregation) was to ground it in a politically enforced system of ethnic pluralism (institutional segregation) so that everyone, victims no less than beneficiaries, may appear as minorities. With migrant labour providing the everyday institutional link between native and white society, native institutions – fashioned as so many tribal composites – may be conserved as separate but would function as subordinate.'

Actual apartheid was far more brutal. For a start only the productive male was permitted to reside and work in white areas, when not as a house-boy, in 'hostels' segregated by tribes. Those classified as unproductive were pushed back into native areas, cordoned off and placed under the rule of chieftans, who in turn were bought off or kept quiescent through bribes and non-interference. 'This doctrine of differentiation aims at the evolution of separate institutions appropriate to African conditions and differing both in spirit and form from those of Europeans.' The emphasis on differentiation meant the forging of specifically

native institutions through which to rule subjects, but the institutions so defined were not racial as much as ethnic, not native as much as tribal. The same story, with minor variations, can be read throughout Africa.

Overall, this book about the structure of power and the shape of resistance in contemporary Africa explains how current institutions were moulded more by the colonial experience than anti-colonial revolt; that the experience of racial domination through ethnically organised local powers worked against the possibility of forging pan-African unity; and that the different anti-colonial (nationalist) struggles were marked by struggles not only against white rule but other ethnicities (tribes). The burden of Mamdani's thesis is that unless ethnicity is seen as both power and resistance, problem and solution, democratic struggle which does not transcend ethnic differences without denying them can easily slip into a string of ethnic civil wars.

He has sought to establish that apartheid, considered unique to South Africa, is actually the generic form of the colonial state in Africa, be it institutional segregation, indirect rule or what the French called association. This is what Mamdani terms decentralized despotism. He stresses the contradictory aspects of ethnicity—emancipatory and authoritarian. He also argues that although the bifurcated state created by colonialism was deracialised after Independence, it was not democratized, such that post-colonial efforts at reform continue to reproduce a part of the colonial legacy, bringing into being their own variants of despotism.

As someone both outside and straddling the worlds of the whites and blacks, and having experienced a variety of African and non-African contexts, Mamdani is uniquely situated to work through the many entanglements that Africa presents. This book has a much wider resonance—for the multiculturalists in the West as much as to those of us in India. Familiarisation with the African experience would help us work through not only our own colonial history of British India and native principalities, but also the challenges that the creation of new states like Jharkhand or more generally the application of the Eighth Schedule throws up. To understand better the tensions between entities seen as similar, separate but equal, or separate and unequal, Mamdani's book is an essential and delightful read. More so since it unpackages each community entity and traces the relations between the individual and his/her constituent grouping.

**Seminarist**

**SHRINKING SPACES: Minority Rights in South Asia** edited by Sumanta Bannerjee. South Asia Forum for Human Rights (SAFHR), Kathmandu, 1999.

It remains a discomfiting fact that despite significant advances in political and constitutional theory or a far more widespread acceptance of human rights norms in crafting relations between individuals, communities and the state, no historical society to date has been able to resolve its minority question(s). Be it the liberal, multi-party democracies of the West, one-party authoritarian states, 'socialist societies', or military dictatorships—each is marked to different degrees by troubled and sometimes restive minorities.

In addition to a more enduring, 'primordialist' feeling of difference and prejudice influencing inter-group relations, is the difficulty experienced by states in defining a minority. The concept, akin to the 'floating signifier' in post-modernist theory, takes on different attributes in different situations. Minorities thus can be defined by race, ethnicity, religion, language, caste, tribe, gender, age—and the list can be expanded. What are configured as minorities in one context and space become majorities in another viz. Sikhs, an all-India minority are a majority in Punjab; Hindus, an all-India majority are a minority in Kashmir.

Nor is the picture of a minority as a persecuted group always valid. Whites were the ruling minority in colonial Africa. So too were the people of Indian origin in the Fiji. The picture gets further complicated if we look at the relative power and influence of minority groups across sectors. Jews as a religious minority in Christian West are often victims of social prejudice; this when, as a group, they are dominant in the economic and financial sectors.

As important is the differential recognition granted to social-historical groupings such as peoples, nations and nationalities. Human rights conventions recognise the 'right to self-determination of peoples'. Minorities, however, have to be accommodated within frameworks of 'autonomy' and federal politics'. Are then minorities entitled to, and if so when and under what conditions, aspire to statehood as a people?

This distinction in international law and thinking between peoples, nationalities, nations on the one hand and minorities on the other has assumed significance because of the inviolability of borders in the international state system. Since much of the boundary-making exercises in the wake of decolonisation resulted in peculiar borders, often dividing communi-

ties, we are now confronted with groups who are minorities in one nation while being majorities in the neighbouring country, or are minorities everywhere. Insecure minority politics thus gets a new political colouring given the drive of modern nation states to create a unified and homogenous citizenry, i.e., to try and obliterate public markers of difference to ensure uniform application of law. It is thus no surprise that minority groups feel restive and discriminated against.

Finally, while using the terms minority and majority, to assume that these groupings are homogenous would be an error. Each grid around which a community is defined, gets sub-divided around others in practice. For instance, Muslims as a religious community are deeply divided within on grids of sect, language, caste and region. Who, therefore, is to be treated as a dominant majority and discriminated minority is a reflection of the working out of the political process.

The book under review, an outcome of a meeting organised by SAFHR, presents interesting reflections on the situation of minorities in each of the countries in South Asia. Ably edited by Sumanta Bannerjee, it explicates the difficulties by both the peoples and the regimes in our region in accommodating minority aspirations within an internationally acceptable framework of democratic rights.

It does not make for pleasant reading, for despite significant differences in the legal regimen governing minority rights and entitlements in different countries, the overall tendency is one of either 'a drift towards supine despair at one end of the spectrum or towards terrorist activism at the other.' Even more depressing is the realisation that each minority group seeking and demanding democratic rights from the state simultaneously reflects an authoritarian, if not barbaric, streak towards sub-groups within. The only groupings who suffer permanent discrimination are dalits and women.

An implication of this collection, particularly for the Indians, is that despite a more liberal formal framework governing minorities, its practice is not very different from countries trapped in more rigid frameworks. This, at least, should force those interested in ensuring meaningful human rights to all, to look for solutions different from those already tried. Evidently, while better compliance of UN norms regarding national, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities would help (a recommendation of the symposium), it is time that we revisit the presuppositions behind the construction of communities.

**IDENTITIES AND RIGHTS: Aspects of Liberal Democracy in India** by Gurpreet Mahajan. Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998.

THIS book is an examination of the specificity of Indian democracy with regard to the space provided by the Constitution and the state for 'strong community identities and a similar communitarian politics.' The author is concerned with demonstrating that these 'apparently non-liberal facets of Indian democracy' are not a legacy of 'Indian culture and tradition'. Rather, they are 'a consequence of the attempt to conform to contemporary ideals and norms of liberal theory' (13). The emphasis on groups and communities in India does not simply reflect a social given, but arises from the centrality given to the principle of social equality in the Indian Constitution. The author's argument is that the individual is not the only legitimate subject of democratic discourse, and that almost all welfare democracies recognize communities in policy and law. Their presence in the Indian Constitution, therefore, does not 'mark a radical departure from liberal democratic practices' (155-8).

At the same time, however, Mahajan wants to establish the fact that individual rights are a 'primary instrument of democratization' (179). The emphasis on cultural diversity has resulted in foregrounding the community within Indian democracy, at the cost of the protection of individual rights. The concern of inter-group equality has hindered the realization of intra-group equality, leading to the subordination of women as a group through the continued existence of unreformed religious personal laws. Under these circumstances, Mahajan argues, 'the universalizing logic of individual rights retains its democratic potential' (178). Individual rights may be justifiably curtailed only in pursuit of 'the essential ideals of democracy: namely, non-discrimination,' that is, they may be restricted only when the exercise of individual rights continuously and systematically disadvantages a specific group in society (179).

Group rights too, have a space within democracy only to the extent that these are necessary to prevent groups from being excluded or disadvantaged by societal practices. Thus, 'non-discrimination' is the key value by which group rights and individual rights may be legitimated in a democracy. Indeed, the author concludes that all other considerations for justifying (and by implication, limiting) rights 'remain suspect'. This is the criterion too by which the author is critical of demands for the continuation and extension of reser-



vations and other privileges. These were initially meant to ensure non discrimination, but now their extension is demanded on the grounds of 'adequate representation rather than exclusion' (154). In a society faced with acute scarcity, 'the agenda of development and transformation has taken over the concern for non discrimination. As a result, the consensus that prevailed earlier on the issue of reservations and special consideration has been eroded and replaced by social group confrontations' (8).

This argument is unexceptionable in that non discrimination should certainly be the cornerstone of any democracy. However, I am not sure this category takes us very far in understanding contemporary politics in India. The crucial battles in India's political arena today are not fought over whether non discrimination is a legitimate value or not, but on two rather different grounds. One, groups make rival claims of being discriminated against—for example, Hindutva arguments produce Hindus as having been discriminated against by the practice of 'pseudo-secularism' while anti-Mandal politics produced upper castes as oppressed by reservations. So the mere criterion of non discrimination will not help us in judging between such rival claims.

Two, following from this arises a more crucial problem. Which is the agency that will ensure non discrimination or adjudicate between rival claims is itself in question?

The legitimacy of the state to ensure non discrimination and bring about equality and development is precisely the issue that animates the debates in the women's movement over the uniform civil code, or the movements against big dams. Mahajan's way of posing the problem, although it continuously invokes the position of women within communities as a way of counterposing individual and community rights, is innocent of the complex debates within the women's movement which has led the movement to make such dramatic shifts in position over the last two decades. From an unproblematic assertion of the need for a uniform civil code up to the '80s, a variety of positions have emerged, all of which engage in different ways with the relationship of community, state and women as citizens, and none of which assume the legitimacy of the state to bring about social transformation.

There is also a problem with Mahajan's assumption of the 'Supreme Court' or 'judiciary' being an entity different from 'the state'. Even within the framework of liberal theory surely the legislature, executive and judiciary are all arms of the state. Thus when she continually makes assertions about how 'the judiciary'

has restricted the ability of 'the state' to regulate and redefine religious practices, thus 'enhancing the autonomy of religious and cultural communities,' one is puzzled. Much scholarly and political critique has been precisely about the fact that the practice of secularism in India has been vitiated by the manner in which the state (through judicial intervention) has continually sought to define religious practices, religious identity, and inter-religious relationships. The continual intervention of the judiciary in such legal cases has in fact circumscribed and attempted to legitimise particular religio-cultural practices as legitimate and delegitimise others. How this can enhance the autonomy of communities vis-à-vis the state is difficult to understand.

Finally, one is also intrigued by Mahajan's manner of defending the Indian Constitution from the assumed charge of being 'non-liberal'. From her own exposition, it is quite clear that when the Constitution was framed, it was at a moment in history when the liberal framework did not recognize community rights. Thus, at that point, it 'deviated' from liberal principles (4). In other words, the Indian Constitution *anticipated* changes in liberal philosophy and politics. Why then, does Mahajan take such pains to establish that as a result of *later* changes in liberal perspective, it was the Indian Constitution that returned to the liberal fold? 'As a result of this change in liberal perception,' writes a relieved Mahajan, 'the primary concerns of the Indian Constitution conform with new liberal agendas and perspectives' (6). One would have imagined that the 'deviation' in the first instance should have provoked a very different type of inquiry into the nature of both Indian democracy and liberalism. Instead, the demand that Indian democracy should justify itself in terms of 'liberalism' as an *a priori* value places severe limits on any attempt to understand politics in India.

Nivedita Menon

**OVER A BARREL: Light Weapons and Human Rights in the Commonwealth** edited by Abdel-Fatau Musah and Niobe Thompson. Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, New Delhi, 1999.

In lay terms, light weapons are military-style conventional arms that can be carried by an individual or by a light vehicle. The United Nations categorises light weapons as heavy machine guns, hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft/tank guns, recoilless rifles, portable anti-aircraft missile system launchers and mortars of calibres less than 100 mm. Small arms constitute a sub-category of light weapons and include revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines,

sub-machine guns, assault rifles and light machine guns, anti-tank and anti-personnel hand grenades, landmines and explosives

(*Over A Barrel*)

THE statistics are chilling. An estimated seven million small arms continue to stoke the embers of the Afghan conflict. After the conclusion of a two-year United Nations disarmament campaign, there are still over 1.5 million automatic rifles among a population of 16 million in Mozambique. In excess of 100,000 rifles and machine guns are in private hands in Karachi. In Jammu and Kashmir, over 20,000 civilians have died during the decade-old Pakistan-sponsored 'proxy war'; most of the deaths have occurred through the indiscriminate firing of light weapons by Pakistan's mercenary terrorists. Thousands of innocent civilians die every year in Sri Lanka's LTTE-driven insurgency. Even in a well-developed country like the United States (population 264 million) there are as many guns as people. Gun violence leads to about 30 deaths a day in South Africa. The daily toll in Central and Sub-Saharan Africa, with several inter-state and intra-state conflicts raging unabated, is much higher.

During the past decade alone, two million children have been killed, six million have been seriously injured and about one million have been orphaned in ongoing small wars and insurgencies in various parts of the world. Women and children, the most vulnerable members of the civilian population of a war-ravaged country, bear a disproportionate impact of the proliferation of small arms. The indiscriminate spread of light weapons makes it easier to raise private armies and inevitably results in children taking up arms. The emergence of child soldiers in the late 20th century is a horrifying new trend. Nothing is more revolting than pictures of pre-teen desperados clutching Kalashnikov assault rifles in their skinny hands. Oscar Arias, a Nobel laureate, has called the burgeoning small arms trade 'the commerce of death'.

Failed statehood in many parts of the world has led to the rise of local warlords who are the foremost chieftains of violence. Ordinary people are the real victims of 'warlordism' and many dysfunctional governments have become incapable of providing any protection to their citizens. The enduring paradox of the end of the Cold War era is that disarmament in the developed North has led to the dumping of surplus small arms in the underdeveloped South that is prone to ethnic and communal antagonisms. The abundance of weapons acts as a catalyst for violence and spawns new conflicts. This downward spiral of burgeoning

conflict is leading to history's worst violations of human rights – rivalling the holocaust of World War II in scope and magnitude.

*Over a Barrel: Light Weapons and Human Rights in the Commonwealth*, a report by the New Delhi-based Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), 'explores the complexity of the problems of light weapons in the Commonwealth' and highlights the 'Commonwealth's failure to address the tragic consequences of an unrestricted light weapons trade and huge accumulations of weapons in Commonwealth societies', despite the commitment to protect human rights enshrined in the Harare Declaration of 1991.

The various authors, mostly academics and human rights activists, examine the complex links between the burgeoning light weapons trade, including clandestine sales, the shady world of light weapons brokering and the siphoning-off of profits by the ruling elites in conflict prone countries; the quality of governance and the spread of conflict; and, the impact of small arms proliferation on fragile democracies. The role of the United Kingdom and South Africa, the Commonwealth's principal arms-exporting nations, has been analysed and prescriptive approaches to curbing the menace and the long-term threat posed by light weapons have been highlighted.

The chapters on South Asia, in which the violation of human rights is the principal issue discussed, would be of more than passing interest to readers in this region. Peter Chalk describes the Tamil Tiger (LTTE) Insurgency in Sri Lanka. Ayesha Siddiqua provides several new insights in the chapter entitled, *Arresting Light Weapons Proliferation in Pakistan: Is There a Way Ahead?* However, it is the essay on *Small Arms in India and the Human Costs of Lingering Conflict* by Niobe Thompson and Devashish Krishnan that political leaders, diplomats, senior security forces commanders, bureaucrats, defence analysts and academic scholars must read as India continues to be wracked by long drawn-out insurgencies and a 'proxy war' waged through state-sponsored terrorism by a perfidious neighbour.

The authors begin by recounting the brief histories of civil conflicts in Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and India's northeastern states, go on to examine the impact of militancy on the democratic institutions of India and conclude that the state security forces have been transformed over the years and that the Indian peacekeeper has been brutalised. They state that, 'The past two decades have witnessed an escalation not of the causes of unrest in India, but rather of

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the lethality of militancy, and the costs of such violence increasingly threaten to upset the democratic tradition that has survived in India through the last fifty years.'

In an otherwise fairly balanced report, the authors are severely critical of human rights abuses by Indian security forces. However, they fail to take note of the fact that as a ratio of the number of security forces personnel deployed in the strife-torn areas, the number of reported incidents of alleged human rights violations is a miniscule figure. Impartial international observers have accepted, though rather grudgingly, that what the Indian Army has conducted in J&K can only be termed as a 'police operation' with one hand tied behind the back. The principle of the use of 'minimum force' has never been violated. There have been no massacres like the one at My Lai during the Vietnam conflict. Allegations of human rights violations are speedily investigated and, on the rare occasion when these are found to be true, the personnel concerned are court martialled and exemplary punishment is awarded. To their credit, the authors do not hesitate to lay the bulk of the blame for human rights violations squarely on the shoulders of mercenary terrorists sent to India by Pakistan's ISI masquerading as *jihadis*.

The concluding chapter contains many practical recommendations for dealing with the menace of the proliferation of light weapons. The authors have advised the Commonwealth Heads of Government to expeditiously implement measures to control legal transfers of light weapons, combat illegal ones and work towards creating 'cultures of peace'. They have been asked to appoint a Commonwealth High Commissioner for Human Rights and to reinvigorate the Commonwealth Action Group. While these are undoubtedly noble intentions, where this report really lacks is in failing to address the problem at its roots. First, the easy availability of light weapons further fuels the demand for them. Second, unless the underlying causes of small wars and insurgencies are eliminated, killings and massacres will continue unabated. Nevertheless, every step forward in the fight against the proliferation of light weapons is a blow for peace. The report, *Over a Barrel*, is definitely a telling blow.

**Gurmeet Kanwal**

#### ERRATA

In 'Seminar' 489 (May 2000) the book *Drug Supply and Use: Towards a National Drug Policy in India* by Anant Phadke was reviewed by Kaushal Kishore not Ritu Priya. The error is regretted

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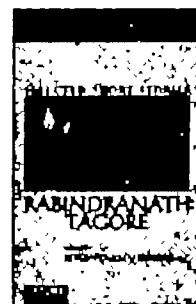
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# Comment

## Crossborder exchanges

THE Women's Bus for Peace symbolizing the dialogue between activists from India and Pakistan under the aegis of the Women's Initiative for Peace in South Asia (WIPSA) represents an important landmark in the people to people interaction between the two countries in recent years. The interaction was all the more important since it came at a time when relations between the two countries had virtually reached an all-time low.

The post-Kargil months have seen a hardening of attitudes in official circles and the hijacking of IC 814 contributed to further deepening the divide in people's minds. The hype preceding the Clinton visit and the Indian government's attempt to dissuade Clinton from visiting Pakistan, as well as the campaign to oust Pakistan from the Commonwealth, have only added to a thickening of the atmosphere. The fact of a military government at the helm of affairs in Islamabad and the increase in crossborder terrorism has certainly added to the possibility of an escalation of hostilities, furthering the dangers of nuclearization in the region.

While the dialogue between women on both sides was on a positive note, the responses from outside were mixed. Many expressed cynicism about the possibility of achieving peace through such exchanges. Others were positively hostile or derisive. The Indian women on their return from Lahore were faced with a volley of questions on their naiveté in having met the General in Islamabad and taking seriously his offer for talks anywhere, anytime. It was stated, in as many words, that peace between two nations is a subject of hard bargaining and it would be better if women did not meddle in affairs of state. There can be no denying that peace between two countries with a long history of conflict is a matter for governments to deliberate upon. However, it is time people begin to exert pressure on our two governments to sit down and talk.

The sooner this is done, the lesser the chances of third-party intervention and manipulation. In a unipolar world, the parameters and possibilities such intervention holds out are more serious than ever before. Further, that the present government, with its jingoistic rhetoric, has in fact given more leeway to powers having interests in this region is hidden from none. The reason for the successful response to the WIPSA initiative from women cutting across ideologies and areas of specific interest lies in the urgent need for peace

in the region if issues of social development and removal of inequalities have to be addressed.

The facts highlighted by the Human Development Reports in recent years are before us: South Asia has the world's largest number of poor; the largest number of illiterates as well the highest number of children who have never been to school; the largest number of undernourished children are to be found in this region; we have the largest population living under conditions where even basics such as drinking water, sanitation and minimal health facilities are denied to the vast masses. At the same time our region is experiencing militarization at a fast pace and an increase in arms expenditure. Between India and Pakistan we have two of the world's largest standing armies and the ratio of soldiers to doctors is 6:1. Add to this the proliferation of unlicensed arms and the huge increase in illicit arms dealing which lies at the back of growing militancy and the threat to peace in the region becomes clear.

While SAARC has failed to advance any kind of negotiations between countries in the region, a well-organised mafia operates, establishing a nexus between those who trade in illicit goods and indulge in money laundering. Crime, corruption and the underworld flourish with the patronage of a criminal-politician nexus even as governments refuse to find solutions. While governments have been trading charges, the quality of life in the region has declined, the consequences of which have been most visible in women's lives.

Growing violence and its increasing social acceptance has been one of the most visible trends in the region. While the women's movement has succeeded in drawing attention to an increase in domestic violence, attempts to focus on violence experienced by women in conflict situations have not met with much response. Atrocities committed on women in tension-ridden regions, be they by the state or terrorists, have somehow been hidden from the public eye. While Pakistan has been a victim of the denial of democracy, in our country the debate on violation on human rights has been largely confined to social activists. For the large part, such issues remain subsumed under the rubric of national security and there is a lack of transparency of the state apparatus and measures taken to 'deal with challenges to national unity.'

The WIPSA efforts put into focus the urgent need to redefine notions of development as well as security in more human terms if this region is to see lasting peace in any meaningful sense of the term. While no one condones the proxy war being fought on the border, it has also to be recognised that much more needs to be done to strengthen the base of democracy and that includes imparting more substance to federal principles and the devolution of power to structures subject to democratic controls. In any case, it is time policy analysts and those who delve in hard talk understand that talk of peace and posturing on democracy devoid of a human focus and debate on the consequences of choices made regarding the nature of development are matters of public concern. Women activists' efforts have to be seen in a continuum, as part a process of democratic self-assertion.

The importance of the exchange at this moment cannot be overstated even though its tangible effects may not be immediately visible. The need to engage in a dialogue with people across the border is an urgent one, if the fundamentalist-jingoistic combine working overtime on both sides of the border is to be checked in its spread of hatred and its attempt to demonise the other. The Talibanisation of this region has to be prevented at all cost and a first step in this direction would be to get Musharraf to talk so as to draw him into the democratic process rather than facilitate his strengthening ties with the fundamentalist forces. Women have a particular interest in this.

The exchange between the women's delegations was marked by deep warmth and a serious desire for peace in the region, in sharp contrast to official relations between the two countries at the present juncture. Going beyond the usual nostalgia which marks such occasions, participants in the interactive sessions addressed the commonality of issues facing people in this region, particularly challenges in the way of advancing women's rights. While many emphasised the common bonds and shared past, it was also pointed out that in the last 50 years the two nations had developed differently and that common origins did not preclude separate and different identities. It was important to recognise cultural differences so as to not submerge the present reality in the name of recovering the past. The pain of Partition found its echoes, but it was recognized that this could not be allowed to swamp discussions on subsequent developments.

The economic contribution of women has been one of the most closely guarded secrets of the region and no one could be more concerned about this than

the Pakistani women. The invisibility of women in public space acts as a convenient device to keep this reality hidden from society as well as official discourse. Women across the subcontinent have been waging a battle for recognition of their role in the economy only to find that even as they were just beginning to impact official policy and machinery, they were swamped by forces of globalization which effect their further marginalisation. Many speakers in the discussions highlighted the manner in which the process of economic reforms, ushered in at the behest of international agencies, has added to women's economic burden while simultaneously.

The rise of fundamentalist forces in both India and Pakistan and their direct confrontation with the struggle for women's equality, as well as the denial of space within decision-making fora, were some of the common problems identified in the discussions. The tenor of the discussions reflected the participants' deep concern about the obstacles to democratic governance and the consequent denial of space to women. Depiction of women in cultural stereotypes was a common device to deny women equality in the social sphere and women on both sides agreed on their opposition to the use of religion to advance social orthodoxy.

While women from Pakistan expressed concern at the invoking of retrogressive laws to deny them basic social and legal rights, the Indian women were apprehensive about attempts to go back on advances made in the last century and a half, as well as to impose fundamentalist prescripts. The use of history and the state apparatus by the fundamentalist forces to advance their agenda came in for sharp criticism. Cultural exchange and discussions on related issues featured prominently throughout both visits.

Both in the formal sessions as well as meetings with students, artists, writers and educationists, the need to have more interaction so as to recover and strengthen cultural bonds was reiterated. The poetry of Faiz and songs from the rich repertoire of Sufi literature reverberated many a time. The women resolved not to allow the hostility between governments to come in the way of their forging closer links to restore peace and prosperity in the region. Women's special interest in this was expressed repeatedly, even though not many accepted the claim of some WIPSA spokespersons that it was only men who fought and waged wars, while women were inherently and innately destined to work for peace.

**Indu Agnihotri**

# Backpage

IN early May, the Review Committee for Genetic Manipulation, a statutory body under the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), granted 'biosafety clearance' to *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt), a genetically engineered variety of cotton, developed by the American multinational, Monsanto. With this decision Bt cotton, so far restricted to 60 field trial plots, can now be introduced across the country.

While seed companies are likely to celebrate this decision, activist groups spearheading a campaign against the introduction of genetically manipulated seed varieties have suffered a major setback. Evidently, the experts in the review committee were not sufficiently moved by the 'scare scenario' painted by the activists or hold as serious the 'threat' of new crop diseases affecting Indian agriculture.

The opposition to Monsanto was fuelled not just by Luddite fears but also by swadeshi concern about control of our agriculture by multinational companies. Monsanto, more than other companies, generates dark fears because of its association with 'terminator technology', i.e., seeds which do not automatically regenerate, thereby forcing farmers to go back to the seed supplier for every crop cycle.

Scientific debates about genetic technology apart, what has been less realized are the political implications of this clearance. The field trials for Bt cotton have been challenged in the Supreme Court by the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology; the petition is up for hearing in early July. Does this decision of the DBT then represent a 'side-stepping' of our legal regimen? Given the 'legendary' pace at which our legal system moves, it might be years before the court concludes its hearings and pronounces judgment. Meanwhile, Monsanto would have dramatically expanded the scale of its operations. What then happens to the many farmers hooked onto Bt cotton, that is, if the court rules against its use?

Or will the court be saddled with a fait accompli, since the seed may already be in widespread use. If this indeed is the intention behind the granting of speedy clearance, then the move bodes ill for our democracy. As much as direct agitation and lobbying statutory bodies, courts in our country are still seen as a forum for final appeal. The Supreme Court, in particular, has in recent years acquired a green tinge, an image consolidated by its directives to government on issues of air and water pollution.

Another crucial concern relates to the procedure followed in the Monsanto case. The DBT's decision followed the presentation of trial data by the concerned company. News reports make no mention about whether the critics were invited to present their arguments. Is this a case of a 'rigged' hearing? Or are we to assume that the presence of experts is sufficient to safeguard both national interest and environmental concerns.

If so, at least procedurally, it appears a dangerous move. Consultative committees to Parliament and the courts constitute public space. It is feasible, given some effort, to know the arguments advanced. Also for interested experts and public interest groups to intercede and present their case. Forums like the Review Committee for Genetic Manipulation are 'closed' bodies, shrouded in secrecy. What one comes to know is the decision, not necessarily the process through which it is arrived at or the presuppositions.

There is today widespread criticism of the pace of our decision-making. As much as the innumerable forms to fill, guidelines or departments to satisfy (notwithstanding brave talk of single window, time-bound clearance), there is the danger of projects being tied up in unending legal battles. Cost and time over-runs are common and many projects become unviable even before they can start.

Given the overloading of our court system, the current tendency is to assign 'clearing power' to autonomous boards. In all likelihood, these may become the new sites of struggle, particularly in matters relating to the environment. The tragedy is that most NGOs and advocacy groups have little access to these bodies. Nor are the rules of the game clear. Equally, since the terms of discourse are scientific and technical rather than legal and ethical, and public interest groups are better-known for their missionary zeal than scientific expertise, they are likely to lose out.

One possible corrective is to modify the Freedom of Information Act currently before Parliament to one that ensures a Right to Information. Also, that the proposed Act be modified to cover all decision-making and clearance-granting bodies. Only then can we learn the basis on which decisions are made, assess the 'integrity' of these mechanisms, and institute corrective action. Otherwise we may well be in for a politics of closure.

**Harsh Sethi**



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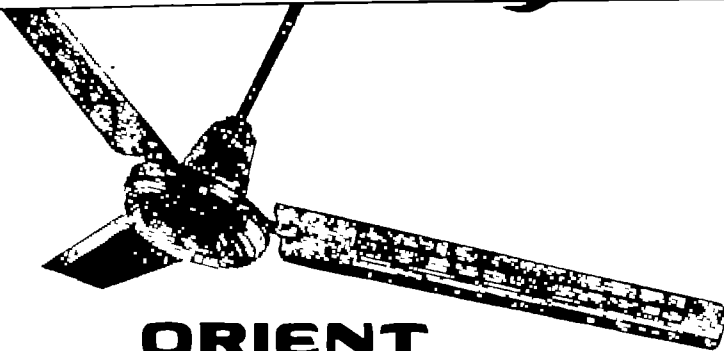
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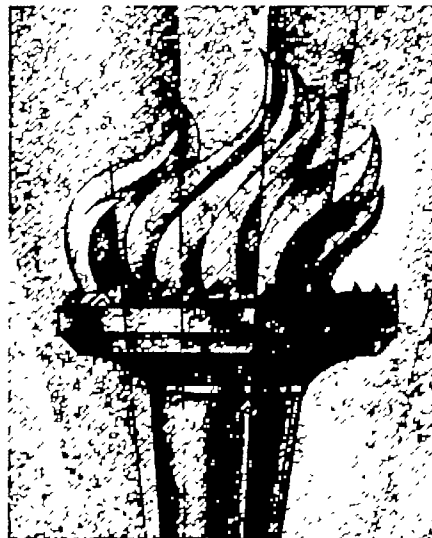
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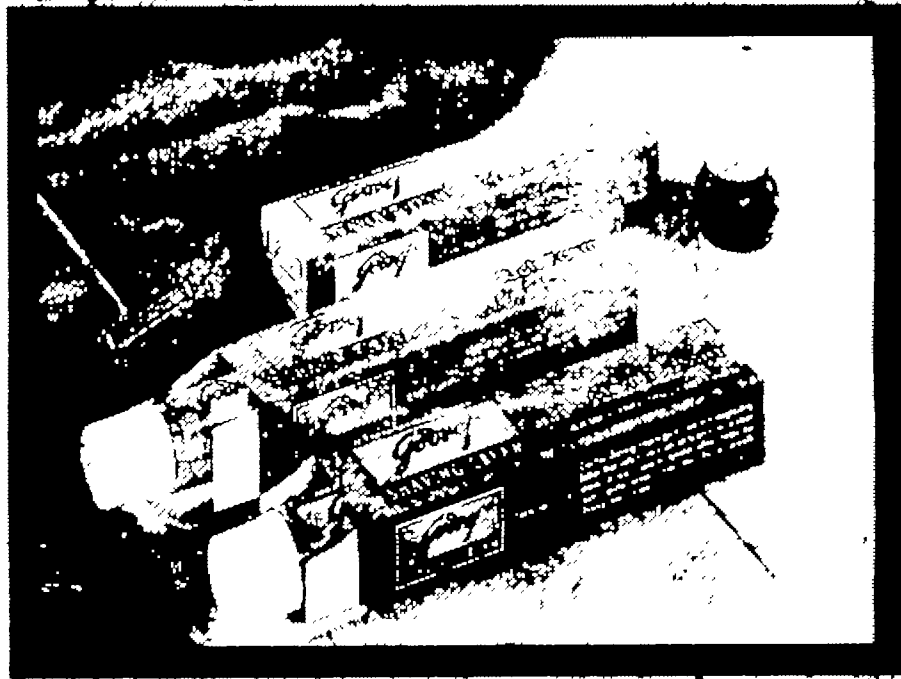
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